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AN

APOLOGY FOR THE BIBLE,

IN

A SERIES OF LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO

THOMAS PAINE,

AUTHOR OF A BOOK ENTITLED

"THE AGE OF REASON, PART THE SECOND,

BEING AN INVESTIGATION OF

TRUE AND OF FABULOUS THEOLOGY."

BY R. WATSON, D. D. F. R. S.
Lord Bishop of Landaff, and Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge.

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LETTER I.

Sir,

I have lately met with a book of yours, entitled—"The Age of Reason, Part the Second, being an Investigation of true and of fabulous Theology;"—and I think it not inconsistent with my station, and the duty I owe to society, to trouble you and the world with some observations on so extraordinary a performance. Extraordinary I esteem it; not from any novelty in the objections which you have produced against revealed religion, (for I find little or no novelty in them,) but from the zeal with which you labour to disseminate your opinions, and from the confidence with which you esteem them true. You perceive, by this, that I give you credit for your sincerity, how much soever I may question your wisdom, in writing in such a manner, on such a subject: and I have no reluctance in acknowledging, that you possess a considerable share of energy of language, and acuteness of investigation; though I must be allowed to lament, that these talents have not been applied in a manner more useful to human kind, and more creditable to yourself.

I begin with your preface. You therein state—that you had long had an intention of publishing your thoughts upon religion, but that you had ori-

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ginally reserved it to a later period in life. I hope there is no want of charity in saying, that it would have been fortunate for the christian world, had your life been terminated before you had fulfilled your intention. In accomplishing your purpose, you will have unsettled the faith of thousands; rooted from the minds of the unhappy virtuous all their comfortable assurance of a future recompense; have annihilated in the minds of the flagitious all their fears of future punishment; you will have given the reins to the domination of every passion, and have thereby contributed to the introduction of the public insecurity, and of the private unhappiness usually and almost necessarily accompanying a state of corrupt morals.

No one can think worse of confession to a priest and subsequent absolution, as practised in the church of Rome, than I do; but I cannot, with you, attribute the guillotine-massacres to that cause. Men's minds are not prepared, as you suppose, for the commission of all manner of crimes, by any doctrines of the church of Rome, corrupted as I esteem it, but by their not thoroughly believing even that religion. What may not society expect from those, who shall imbibe the principles of your book?

A fever, which you and those about you expected would prove mortal, made you remember with renewed satisfaction, that you had written the former part of your "Age of Reason;" and you know, therefore, you say, by experience, the conscientious trial of your own principles. I admit this declaration to be a proof of the sincerity of your persuasion, but I cannot admit it to be any proof of

the truth of your principles. What is conscience? Is it, as has been thought, an internal monitor implanted in us by the Supreme Being, and dictating to us, on all occasions, what is right, or wrong? Or is it merely our own judgment of the moral rectitude or turpitude of our own actions? I take the word (with Mr Locke) in the latter, as in the only intelligible sense. Now who sees not that our judgments of virtue and vice, right and wrong, are not always formed from an enlightened and dispassionate use of our reason, in the investigation of truth? They are more generally formed from the nature of the religion we profess; from the quality of the civil government under which we live; from the general manners of the age, or the particular manners of the persons with whom we associate; from the education we have had in our youth; from the books we have read at a more advanced period; and from other accidental causes. Who sees not that, on this account, conscience may be conformable or repugnant to the law of nature?—may be certain, or doubtful?—and that it can be no criterion of moral rectitude, even when it is certain, because the certainty of an opinion is no proof of its being a right opinion? A man may be certainly persuaded of an error in reasoning, or an untruth in matters of fact. It is a maxim of every law, human and divine, that a man ought never to act in opposition to his conscience: but it will not from thence follow, that he will, in obeying the dictates of his conscience, on all occasions act right. An inquisitor, who burns Jews and heretics; a Robespierre, who massacres innocent and harmless wo-

men; a robber, who thinks that all things ought to be in common, and that a state of property is an unjust infringement of natural liberty;—these, and a thousand perpetrators of different crimes, may all follow the dictates of conscience; and may, at the real or supposed approach of death, remember "with renewed satisfaction" the worst of their transactions, and experience without dismay, "a conscientious trial of their principles." But this their conscientious composure, can be no proof to others of the rectitude of their principles, and ought to be no pledge to themselves of their innocence, in adhering to them.

I have thought fit to make this remark, with a view of suggesting to you a consideration of great importance—whether you have examined calmly and according to the best of your ability, the arguments by which the truth of revealed religion may, in the judgment of learned and impartial men, be established? You will allow, that thousands of learned and impartial men, (I speak not of priests, who, however, are, I trust, as learned and impartial as yourself, but of laymen of the most splendid talents)—you will allow, that thousands of these in all ages have embraced revealed religion as true. Whether these men have all been in an error, enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, shackled by the chains of superstition, whilst you and a few others have enjoyed light and liberty, is a question I submit to the decision of your readers.

If you have made the best examination you can, and yet reject revealed religion as an imposture, I pray that God may pardon what I esteem your error.

And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become me or any man to determine. That gospel, which you despise, has taught me this moderation; it has said to me,—"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth." I think that you are in an error; but whether that error be to you a vincible or an invincible error, I presume not to determine. I know indeed where it is said—"that the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; and that if the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." The consequence of your unbelief must be left to the just and merciful judgment of him, who alone knoweth the mechanism and the liberty of our understandings; the origin of our opinions; the strength of our prejudices; the excellencies and the defects of our reasoning faculties.

I shall, designedly, write this, and the following letters in a popular manner; hoping that thereby they may stand a chance of being perused by that class of readers, for whom your work seems to be particularly calculated, and who are the most likely to be injured by it. The really learned are in no danger of being infected by the poison of infidelity: they will excuse me, therefore, for having entered as little as possible into deep disquisitions concerning the authenticity of the Bible. The subject has been so learnedly, and so frequently, handled by other writers, that it does not want (I had almost said, it does not admit) any farther proof. And it is the more necessary to adopt this mode of answering your book, because you disclaim all learned

appeals to other books, and undertake to prove, from the Bible itself, that it is unworthy of credit. I hope to show, from the Bible itself, the direct contrary. But in case any of your readers should think that you had not put forth all your strength, by not referring for proof of your opinion to ancient authors; lest they should suspect that all ancient authors are in your favour; I will venture to affirm, that had you made a learned appeal to all the ancient books in the world, sacred or profane, christian, jewish, or pagan, instead of lessening, they would have established the credit and authority of the Bible as the word of God.

Quitting your preface, let us proceed to the work itself; in which there is much repetition, and a defect of proper arrangement. I will follow your track, however, as nearly as I can. The first question you propose for consideration is, "Whether there is sufficient authority for believing the Bible to be the word of God, or whether there is not?" You determine this question in the negative, upon what you are pleased to call moral evidence. You hold it impossible that the Bible can be the word of God, because it is therein said, that the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites by the express command of God: and to believe the Bible to be true, we must, you affirm, unbelieve all our belief of the moral justice of God; for wherein, you ask, could crying or smiling infants offend? I am astonished that so acute a reasoner should attempt to disparage the Bible, by bringing forward this exploded and frequently refuted objection of Morgan, Tindal, and Bolingbroke. You pro-

fess yourself to be a Deist, and to believe that there is a God, who created the universe, and established the laws of nature, by which it is sustained in existence. You profess that from the contemplation of the works of God, you derive a knowledge of his attributes; and you reject the Bible, because it ascribes to God things inconsistent (as you suppose) with the attributes which you have discovered to belong to him: in particular, you think it repugnant to his moral justice, that he should doom to destruction the crying or smiling infants of the Canaanites.—Why do you not maintain it to be repugnant to his moral justice, that he should suffer crying or smiling infants to be swallowed up by an earthquake, drowned by an inundation, consumed by a fire, starved by a famine, or destroyed by a pestilence? The word of God is in perfect harmony with his work; crying or smiling infants are subjected to death in both. We believe that the earth, at the express command of God, opened her mouth, and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. This you esteem so repugnant to God's moral justice, that you spurn, as spurious, the book in which the circumstance is related. When Catania, Lima, and Lisbon, were severally destroyed by earthquakes, men with their wives, their sons, and their little ones were swallowed up alive:—why do you not spurn, as spurious, the book of nature in which this fact is certainly written, and from the perusal of which you infer the moral justice of God? You will, probably, reply, that the evils which the Canaanites suffered from the express

command of God, were different from those which are brought on mankind, by the operation of the laws of nature.—Different! In what—Not in the magnitude of the evil—not in the subjects of sufferance—not in the author of it—for my philosophy, at least, instructs me to believe that God not only primarily formed, but that he hath through all ages executed the laws of nature; and that he will, through all eternity, administer them, for the general happiness of his creatures, whether we can, on every occasion, discern that end or not.

I am far from being guilty of the impiety of questioning the existence of the moral justice of God, as proved either by natural or revealed religion; what I contend for is shortly this—that you have no right, in fairness of reasoning, to urge any apparent deviation from moral justice, as an argument against revealed religion, because you do not urge an equally apparent deviation from it, as an argument against natural religion: you reject the former, and admit the latter, without adverting that, as to your objection, they must stand or fall together.

As to the Canaanites, it is needless to enter into any proof of the depraved state of their morals; they were a wicked people in the time of Abraham, and they, even then, were devoted to destruction by God; but their iniquity was not then full. In the time of Moses, they were idolaters, sacrificers of their own crying or smiling infants; devourers of human flesh; addicted to unnatural lust; immersed in the filthiness of all manner of vice. Now, I think, it will be impossible to prove,

that it was a proceeding contrary to God's moral justice, to exterminate so wicked a people. He made the Israelites the executors of his vengeance; and, in doing this, he gave such an evident and terrible proof of his abomination of vice, as could not fail to strike the surrounding nations with astonishment and terror, and to impress on the minds of the Israelites what they were to expect, if they followed the example of the nations whom he commanded them to cut off. "Ye shall not commit any of these abominations—that the land spew not you out also, as it spewed out the nations that were before you." How strong and descriptive this language! The vices of the inhabitants were so abominable, that the very land was sick of them, and forced to vomit them forth, as the stomach disgorges a deadly poison.

I have often wondered what could be the reason that men, not destitute of talents, should be desirous of undermining the authority of revealed religion, and studious in exposing, with a malignant and illiberal exultation, every little difficulty attending the scriptures, to popular animadversion and contempt. I am not willing to attribute this strange propensity to what Plato attributed the Atheism of his time—to profligacy of manners—to affectation of singularity—to gross ignorance, assuming the semblance of deep research and superior sagacity; —I had rather refer it to an impropriety of judgment respecting the manners, and mental acquirements, of human kind in the first ages of the world. Most unbelievers argue, as if they thought that man, in remote and rude antiquity, in the very

birth and infancy of our species, had the same distinct conceptions of one, eternal, invisible, incorporeal, infinitely wise, powerful, and good God, which they themselves have now. This I look upon as a great mistake, and a pregnant source of infidelity. Human kind, by a long experience; by the institutions of civil society; by the cultivation of arts and sciences; by, as I believe, divine instruction actually given to some, and traditionally communicated to all; is in a far more distinguished situation as to the powers of the mind, than it was in the childhood of the world. The history of man is the history of the providence of God; who, willing the supreme felicity of all his creatures, has adapted his government to the capacity of those, who in different ages were the subjects of it. The history of any one nation throughout all ages, and that of all nations in the same age, are but separate parts of one great plan which God is carrying on for the moral melioration of mankind. But who can comprehend the whole of this immense design? The shortness of life, the weakness of our faculties, the inadequacy of our means of information, conspire to make it impossible for us, worms of the earth! insects of an hour! completely to understand any one of its parts. No man, who well weighs the subject, ought to be surprised, that in the histories of ancient times many things should occur foreign to our manners, the propriety and necessity of which we cannot clearly apprehend.

It appears incredible to many, that God Almighty should have had colloquial intercourse with our first parents; that he should have contracted a

kind of friendship for the patriarchs, and entered into covenants with them; that he should have suspended the laws of nature in Egypt; should have been so apparently partial, as to become the God and governor of one particular nation; and should have so far demeaned himself, as to give to that people a burthensome ritual of worship, statutes, and ordinances, many of which seem to be beneath the dignity of his attention, unimportant, and impolitic. I have conversed with many deists, and have always found that the strangeness of these things was the only reason for their disbelief of them: nothing similar has happened in their time; they will not, therefore, admit that these events have really taken place at any time. As well might a child, when arrived at a state of manhood, contend that he had never either stood in need of, or experienced the fostering care of a mother's kindness, the wearisome attention of his nurse, or the instruction and discipline of his schoolmaster. The Supreme Being selected one family from an idolatrous world; nursed it up, by various acts of his providence, into a great nation; communicated to that nation a knowledge of his holiness, justice, mercy, power, and wisdom; disseminated them, at various times, through every part of the earth, that they might be a "leaven to leaven the whole lump," that they might assure all other nations of the existence of one Supreme God, the creator and preserver of the world, the only proper object of adoration. With what reason can we expect, that what was done to one nation, not out of any partiality to them, but for the general good, should

be done to all? that the mode of instruction, which was suited to the infancy of the world, should be extended to the maturity of its manhood, or to the imbecility of its old age; I own to you, that when I consider how nearly man, in a savage state, approaches to the brute creation, as to intellectual excellence; and when I contemplate his miserable attainments, as to the knowledge of God, in a civilized state, when he has had no divine instruction on the subject, or when that instruction has been forgotten, (for all men have known something of God from tradition,) I cannot but admire the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being, in having let himself down to our apprehensions; in having given to mankind, in the earliest ages, sensible and extraordinary proofs of his existence and attributes; in having made the jewish and christian dispensations mediums to convey to all men, through all ages, that knowledge concerning himself, which he had vouchsafed to give immediately to the first. I own it is strange, very strange, that he should have made an immediate manifestation of himself in the first ages of the world; but what is there that is not strange? It is strange that you and I are here—that there is water, and earth, and air, and fire—that there is a sun, and moon, and stars—that there is generation, corruption, reproduction. I can account ultimately for none of these things, without recurring to him who made every thing. I also am his workmanship, and look up to him with hope of preservation through all eternity; I adore him for his word as well as for his work: his work I cannot comprehend, but his word hath assured me of all

that I am concerned to know—that he hath prepared everlasting happiness for those who love and obey him. This you will call preachment,—I will have done with it; but the subject is so vast, and the plan of Providence, in my opinion, so obviously wise and good, that I can never think of it without having my mind filled with piety, admiration, and gratitude.

In addition to the moral evidence (as you are pleased to think it) against the Bible, you threaten, in the progress of your work, to produce such other evidence as even a priest cannot deny. A philosopher in search of truth forfeits with me all claim to candour and impartiality, when he introduces railing for reasoning, vulgar and illiberal sarcasm in the room of argument. I will not imitate the example you set me; but examine what you shall produce with as much coolness and respect, as if you had given the priests no provocation; as if you were a man of the most unblemished character, subject to no prejudices, actuated by no bad designs, not liable to have abuse retorted upon you with success.

LETTER II.

Before you commence your grand attack upon the Bible, you wish to establish a difference between the evidence necessary to prove the authenticity of the Bible, and that of any other ancient book. I am not surprised at your anxiety on this head; for all writers on the subject have agreed in thinking that St Austin reasoned well, when, in vindicating the genuineness of the Bible, he asked, "What proofs have we that the works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Varro, and other profane authors, were written by those whose names they bear; unless it be that this has been an opinion generally received at all times, and by all those who have lived since these authors?" This writer was convinced, that the evidence which established the genuineness of any profane book, would establish that of a sacred book: and I profess myself to be of the same opinion, notwithstanding what you have advanced to the contrary.

In this part your ideas seem to me to be confused; I do not say, that you, designedly, jumble together mathematical science and historical evidence; the knowledge acquired by demonstration, and the probability derived from testimony. You know but of one ancient book, that authoritatively challenges

universal consent and belief, and that is Euclid's Elements. If I were disposed to make frivolous objections, I should say that even Euclid's Elements had not met with universal consent; that there had been men, both in ancient and modern times, who had questioned the intuitive evidence of some of his axioms, and denied the justness of some of his demonstrations; but, admitting the truth, I do not see the pertinency of your observation. You are attempting to subvert the authenticity of the Bible, and you tell us that Euclid's Elements are certainly true.—What then?—Does it follow that the Bible is certainly false? The most illiterate scrivener in the kingdom does not want to be informed, that the examples in his Wingate's Arithmetic, are proved by a different kind of reasoning from that by which he persuades himself to believe, that there was such a person as Henry VIII. or that there is such a city as Paris.

It may be of use, to remove this confusion in your argument, to state, distinctly, the difference between the genuineness, and the authenticity, of a book. A genuine book is that which was written by the person whose name it bears, as the author of it. An authentic book is that which relates matters of fact, as they really happened. A book may be genuine without being authentic; and a book may be authentic without being genuine. The books written by Richardson and Fielding, are genuine books, though the histories of Clarissa and Tom Jones are fables. The history of the island of Formosa is a genuine book; it was written by Psalmanazar; but it is not an authentic book,

(though it was long esteemed as such, and translat- into different languages,) for the author, in the latter part of his life, took shame to himself for having imposed on the world, and confessed that it was a mere romance. Anson's voyage may be considered as an authentic book, it, probably, containing a true narration of the principal events recorded in it; but it is not a genuine book, having not been written by Walters, to whom it is ascribed, but by Robins.

This distinction between the genuineness and authenticity of a book, will assist us in detecting the fallacy of an argument, which you state with great confidence in the part of your work now under consideration, and which you frequently allude to, in other parts, as conclusive evidence against the truth of the Bible. Your argument stands thus—if it be found that the books ascribed to Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, were not written by Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, every part of the authority and authenticity of these books is gone at once. I presume to think otherwise. The genuineness of these books (in the judgment of those who say that they were written by these authors) will certainly be gone; but their authenticy may remain; they may still contain a true account of real transactions, though the names of the writers of them should be found to be different from what they are generally esteemed to be.

Had, indeed, Moses said that he wrote the first five books of the Bible; and had Joshua and Samuel said that they wrote the books which are respectively attributed to them; and had it been

found, that Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, did not write these books; then, I grant, the authority of the whole would have been gone at once; these men would have been found liars, as to the genuineness of the books; and this proof of their want of veracity, in one point, would have invalidated their testimony in every other: these books would have been justly stigmatized, as neither genuine nor authentic.

An history may be true, though it should not only be ascribed to a wrong author, but though the author of it should not be known; anonymous testimony does not destroy the reality of facts, whether natural or miraculous. Had Lord Clarendon published his History of the Rebellion, without prefixing his name to it; or had the history of Titus Livius come down to us, under the name of Valerius Flaccus, or Valerius Maximus; the facts mentioned in these histories would have been equally certain.

As to your assertion, that the miracles recorded in Tacitus, and in other profane histories, are quite as well authenticated as those of the Bible—it, being a mere assertion, destitute of proof, may be properly answered by a contrary assertion. I take the liberty then to say, that the evidence for the miracles recorded in the Bible is, both in kind and degree, so greatly superior to that for the prodigies mentioned by Livy, or the miracles related by Tacitus, as to justify us in giving credit to the one as the work of God, and in withholding it from the other as the effect of superstition and imposture. This method of derogating from the credibility of

Christianity, by opposing to the miracles of our Saviour, the tricks of ancient impostors, seems to have originated with Hierocles in the fourth century; and it has been adopted by unbelievers from that time to this; with this difference, indeed, that the heathens of the third and fourth century admitted that Jesus wrought miracles; but lest that admission should have compelled them to abandon their gods and become Christians, they said, that their *Apollonius*, their *Apuleius*, their *Aristeas*, did as great: whilst modern deists deny the fact of Jesus having ever wrought a miracle. And they have some reason for this proceeding: they are sensible that the gospel miracles are so different, in all their circumstances, from those related in pagan story, that, if they admit them to have been performed, they must admit Christianity to be true; hence they have fabricated a kind of deistical axiom—that no human testimony can establish the credibility of a miracle.—This, though it has been a hundred times refuted, is still insisted upon, as if its truth had never been questioned, and could not be disproved.

You "proceed to examine the authenticity of the Bible; and you begin, you say, with what are called the five books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Your intention, you profess, is to show that these books are spurious, and that Moses is not the author of them; and still farther, that they were not written in the time of Moses, nor till several hundred years afterwards; that they are no other than an attempted history of the life of Moses, and of the times in

which he is said to have lived, and also of the times prior thereto, written by some very ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, several hundred years after the death of Moses." In this passage the utmost force of your attack on the authority of the five books of Moses is clearly stated. You are not the first who has started this difficulty; it is a difficulty, indeed, of modern date; having not been heard of, either in the synagogue, or out of it, till the twelfth century. About that time *Aben Ezra*, a Jew of great erudition, noticed some passages, (the same which you have brought forward) in the first five books of the Bible, which he thought had not been written by Moses, but inserted by some person after the death of Moses. But he was far from maintaining, as you do, that these books were written by some ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, many hundred years after the death of Moses. *Hobbes* contends, that the books of Moses are so called, not from their having been written by Moses, but from their containing an account of Moses. *Spinoza* supported the same opinion; and *Le Clerc*, a very able theological critic of the last and present century, once entertained the same notion. You see that this fancy has had some patrons before you; the merit or the demerit, the sagacity or the temerity of having asserted, that Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch is not exclusively yours. *Le Clerc*, indeed, you must not boast of. When his judgment was matured by age, he was ashamed of what he had written on the subject in his younger years. He made a public recantation of his error, by annexing to his com-

mentary on Genesis, a Latin dissertation—concerning Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, and his design in composing it. If in your future life you should chance to change your opinion on the subject, it will be an honour to your character to emulate the integrity, and to imitate the example of *Le Clerc*. The Bible is not the only book which has undergone the fate of being reprobated as spurious, after it had been received as genuine and authentic for many ages. It has been maintained that the history of *Herodotus* was written in the time of *Constantine;* and that the classics are forgeries of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. These extravagant reveries amused the world at the time of their publication, and have long since sunk into oblivion. You esteem all prophets to be such lying rascals, that I dare not venture to predict the fate of your book.

Before you produce your main objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you assert, that "there is no affirmative evidence that Moses is the author of them." What! no affirmative evidence! In the eleventh century *Maimonides* drew up a confession of faith for the Jews, which all of them at this day admit; it consists of only thirteen articles; and two of them have respect to Moses; one affirming the authenticity, the other the genuineness of his books.—The doctrine and prophecy of Moses is true—The law that we have was given by Moses. This is the faith of the Jews at present, and has been their faith ever since the destruction of their city and temple: it was their faith in the time when the authors of the New Testament

wrote; it was their faith during their captivity in Babylon; in the time of their kings and judges; and no period can be shown, from the age of Moses to the present hour, in which it was not their faith.—Is this no affirmative evidence? I cannot desire a stronger. *Josephus*, in his book against *Apion*, writes thus: "We have only two and twenty books which are to be believed as of divine authority, and which comprehend the history of all ages; five belong to Moses, which contain the original of man, and the tradition of the succession of generations, down to his death, which takes in a compass of about three thousand years." Do you consider this as no affirmative evidence? Why should I mention *Juvenal* speaking of the volume which Moses had written? Why enumerate a long list of profane authors, all bearing testimony to the fact of *Moses* being the leader and the law-giver of the Jewish nation? and if a law-giver, surely a writer of the laws. But what says the Bible? In Exodus it says, "Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people." In Deuteronomy it says, "And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, (this surely imports the finishing a laborious work,) that Moses commanded the Levites which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." This is said in Deuteronomy, which is a kind of repetition, or abridg-

ment of the four preceding books; and it is well known that the Jews gave the name of the Law to the first five books of the Old Testament. What possible doubt can there be that Moses wrote the books in question? I could accumulate many other passages from the scriptures to this purpose; but if what I have advanced will not convince you that there is affirmative evidence, and of the strongest kind, for Moses being the author of these books, nothing that I can advance will convince you.

What if I should grant all you undertake to prove (the stupidity and ignorance of the writer excepted)? What if I should admit, that *Samuel*, or *Ezra*, or some othor learned Jew, composed these books, from public records, many years after the death of Moses? Will it follow, that there was no truth in them? According to my logic, it will only follow, that they are not genuine books; every fact recorded in them may be true, whenever, or by whomsoever they were written. It cannot be said that the Jews had no public records; the Bible furnishes abundance of proof to the contrary. I by no means admit, that these books, as to the main part of them, were not written by Moses; but I do contend, that a book may contain a true history, though we know not the author of it; or though we may be mistaken in ascribing it to a wrong author.

The first argument you produce against Moses being the author of these books is so old, that I do not know its original author; and it is so miserable an one, that I wonder you should adopt it—"These books cannot be written by Moses, because they

are wrote in the third person; it is always, The Lord said unto Moses, or Moses said unto the Lord. This, you say, is the style and manner that historians use in speaking of the person whose lives and actions they are writing." This observation is true, but it does not extend far enough; for this is the style and manner, not only of historians writing of other persons, but of eminent men, such as *Xenophon* and *Josephus*, writing of themselves. If General *Washington* should write the history of the American war, and should, from his great modesty, speak of himself in the third person, would you think it reasonable that, two or three thousand years hence, any person should, on that account, contend, that the history was not true? *Cæsar* writes of himself in the third person—it is always, Cæsar made a speech, or a speech was made to Cæsar; Cæsar crossed the Rhine, Cæsar invaded Britain; but every school-boy knows, that this circumstance cannot be adduced as a serious argument against Cæsar's being the author of his own commentaries.

But Moses, you urge, cannot be the author of the book of Numbers, because he says of himself, "that Moses was a very meek man, above all the men that were on the face of the earth." If he said this of himself, he was, you say, "a vain and arrogant coxcomb, (such is your phrase!) and unworthy of credit; and if he did not say it, the *books* are without authority." This your dilemma is perfectly harmless; it has not an horn to hurt the weakest logician. If Moses did not write this little verse, if it was inserted by Samuel, or any of

his countrymen, who knew his character, and revered his memory, will it follow that he did not write any other part of the book of Numbers? Or if he did not write any part of the book of Numbers, will it follow that he did not write any of the other books of which he is usually reputed the author? And if he did write this of himself, he was justified by the occasion which extorted from him this commendation. Had this expression been written in a modern style and manner, it would probably have given you no offence. For who would be so fastidious as to find fault with an illustrious man, who, being calumniated by his nearest relations, as guilty of pride, and fond of power, should vindicate his character by saying, My temper was naturally as meek and unassuming as that of any man upon earth? There are occasions, in which a modest man, who speaks truly, may speak proudly of himself, without forfeiting his general character; and there is no occasion, which either more requires, or more excuses this conduct, than when he is repelling the foul and envious aspersions of those who both knew his character and had experienced his kindness: and in that predicament stood *Aaron* and *Miriam*, the accusers of Moses. You yourself have, probably, felt the sting of calumny, and have been anxious to remove the impression. I do not call you a vain and arrogant coxcomb for vindicating your character, when in the latter part of this very work you boast, and I hope truly, "that the man does not exist that can say I have persecuted him, or any man, or any set of men, in the American revolution, or in the

French revolution; or that I have in any case returned evil for evil." I know not what kings and priests may say to this; you may not have returned to them evil for evil, because they never, I believe, did you any harm; but you have done them all the harm you could, and that without provocation.

I think it needless to notice your observation upon what you call the dramatic style of Deuteronomy; it is an ill-founded hypothesis. You might as well ask, where the author of Cæsar's commentaries got the speeches of Cæsar, as where the author of Deuteronomy got the speeches of Moses. But your argument, that Moses was not the author of Deuteronomy, because the reason given in that book for the observation of the sabbath is different from that given in Exodus, merits a reply.

You need not be told that the very name of this book imports, in Greek, a repetition of a law; and that the Hebrew doctors have called it by a word of the same meaning. In the fifth verse of the first chapter it is said in our Bibles, "Moses began to declare this law;" but the Hebrew words, more properly translated, import that Moses "began, or determined, to explain the law." This is no shift of mine to get over a difficulty; the words are so rendered in most of the ancient versions, and by *Fagius*, *Vetablus*, and *Le Clerc*, men eminently skilled in the Hebrew language. This repetition and explanation of the law, was a wise and benevolent proceeding in Moses; that those who were either not born or were mere infants, when it was first (forty years before) delivered in Horeb, might

have an opportunity of knowing it; especially as Moses their leader was soon to be taken from them, and they were about to be settled in the midst of nations given to idolatry and sunk in vice. Now where is the wonder, that some variations, and some additions should be made to a law, when a legislator thinks fit to republish it many years after its first promulgation?

With respect to the sabbath, the learned are divided in opinion concerning its origin; some contending that it was sanctified from the creation of the world; that it was observed by the patriarchs before the flood; that it was neglected by the Israelites during their bondage in Egypt; revived on the falling of manna in the wilderness; and enjoined as a positive law at Sinai. Others esteem its institution to have been no older than the age of Moses; and argue, that what is said of the sanctification of the sabbath in the book of Genesis, is said by way of anticipation. There may be truth in both these accounts. To me it is probable, that the memory of the creation was handed down from Adam to all his posterity: and that the seventh day was, for a long time, held sacred by all nations in commemoration of that event; but that the peculiar rigidness of its observance was enjoined by Moses to the Israelites alone. As to there being two reasons given for its being kept holy,—one, that on that day God rested from the work of creation—the other, that on that day God had given them rest from the servitude of Egypt—I see no contradiction in the accounts. If a man, in writing the history of England, should inform his readers, that

the parliament had ordered the fifth of November to be kept holy, because on that day God had delivered the nation from a bloody-intended massacre by gunpowder; and if, in another part of his history, he should assign the deliverance of our church and nation from popery and arbitrary power, by the arrival of King William, as a reason for its being kept holy; would any one contend, that he was not justified in both these ways of expression, or that we ought from thence to conclude, that he was not the author of them both?

You think "that law in Deuteronomy inhuman and brutal, which authorizes parents, the father and the mother, to bring their own children to have them stoned to death for what it is pleased to call stubbornness." You are aware, I suppose, that paternal power, amongst the *Romans*, the *Gauls*, the *Persians*, and other nations, was of the most arbitrary kind; that it extended to the taking away the life of the child. I do not know whether the Israelites in the time of Moses exercised this paternal power; it was not a custom adopted by all nations, but it was by many; and in the infancy of society, before individual families had coalesced into communities, it was probably very general. Now Moses, by this law, which you esteem brutal and inhuman, hindered such an extravagant power from being either introduced or exercised amongst the Israelites. This law is so far from countenancing the arbitrary power of a father over the life of his child, that it takes from him the power of accusing the child before a magistrate—the father and the mother of the child must agree in

bringing the child to judgment—and it is not by their united will that the child was to be condemned to death; the elders of the city were to judge whether the accusation was true; and the accusation was to be not merely, as you insinuate, that the child was stubborn, but that he was "stubborn and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard." Considered in this light, you must allow the law to have been an humane restriction of a power improper to to be lodged with any parent.

That you may abuse the priests, you abandon your subject. "Priests," you say, "preach up Deuteronomy, for Deuteronomy preaches up tythes." I do not know that priests preach up Deuteronomy, more than they preach up other books of scripture; but I do know that tythes are not preached up in Deuteronomy, more than in Leviticus, in Numbers, in Chronicles, in Malachi, in the law, the history, and the prophets of the Jewish nation. You go on—"it is from this book, chap. xxv. ver. 4, they have taken the phrase, and applied it to tything, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn;' and that this might not escape observation, they have noted it in the table of contents at the head of the chapter, though it is only a single verse of less than two lines. O priests! priests! ye are willing to be compared to an ox for the sake of tythes!" I cannot call this, reasoning, and I will not pollute my page by giving it a proper appellation. Had the table of contents, instead of simply saying, the ox is not to be muzzled, said, tythes enjoined, or priests to be maintained, there would have been a little ground for your cen-

sure. Whoever noted this phrase at the head of the chapter, had better reason for doing it, than you have attributed to them. They did it, because St Paul had quoted it, when he was proving to the Corinthians, that they who preached the gospel had a right to live by the gospel; it was Paul, and not the priests, who first applied this phrase to tything. St Paul, indeed, did not avail himself of the right he contended for; he was not, therefore, interested in what he said. The reason, on which he grounds the right, is not merely this quotation, which you ridicule; nor the appointment of the law of Moses, which you think fabulous; nor the injunction of Jesus, which you despise; no, it is a reason founded in the nature of things, and which no philosopher, no unbeliever, no man of common sense can deny to be a solid reason; it amounts to this, that "the labourer is worthy of his hire." Nothing is so much a man's own, as his labour and ingenuity; and it is entirely consonant to the law of nature, that by the innocent use of these he should provide for his subsistence. Husbandmen, artists, soldiers, physicians, lawyers, all let out their labour and tallents for a stipulated reward: why may not a priest do the same? Some accounts of you have been published in England; but, conceiving them to have proceeded from a design to injure your character, I never read them. I know nothing of your parentage, your education, or condition in life. You may have been elevated, by your birth, above the necessity of acquiring the means of sustaining life by the labour either of hand or head: if this be the case, you ought not to despise those who have

come into the world in less favorable circumstances. If your origin has been less fortunate, you must have supported yourself, either by manual labour, or the exercise of your genius. Why should you think that conduct disreputable in priests, which you probably consider as laudable in yourself? I know not whether you have not as great a dislike of kings as of priests; but that you may be induced to think more favorably of men of my profession, I will just mention to you that the payment of tythes is no new institution, but that they were paid in the most ancient times, not to priests only, but to kings. I could give you an hundred instances of this: two may be sufficient. *Abraham* paid tythes to the king of Salem, four hundred years before the law of Moses was given. The king of Salem was priest also of the most high God. Priests, you see, existed in the world, and were held in high estimation, for kings were priests, long before the impostures, as you esteem them, of the Jewish and Christian dispensations were heard of. But as this instance is taken from a book which you call "a book of contradictions and lies," the Bible; I will give your another, from a book, to the authority of which, as it is written by a profane author, you probably will not object. *Diogenes Laertius*, in his life of *Solon*, cites a letter of *Pisistratus* to that lawgiver, in which he says, "I Pisistratus, the tyrant, am contented with the stipends which were paid to those who reigned before me; the people of Athens set apart a *tenth* of the fruits of their land, not for my private use, but to be expended in the public sacrifices, and for the general good."

LETTER III.

HAVING done with what you call the grammatical evidence that Moses was not the author of the books attributed to him, you come to your historical and chronological evidence; and you begin with Genesis. Your first argument is taken from the single word *Dan* being found in Genesis, when it appears from the book of Judges, that the town of Laish was not called Dan till above three hundred and thirty years after the death of Moses; therefore the writer of Genesis, you conclude, must have lived after the town of Laish had the name of Dan given to it. Lest this objection should not be obvious enough to a common capacity, you illustrate it in the following manner; "Havre-de-Grace was called Havre-Marat in 1793; should then any dateless writing be found, in after times, with the name of Havre-Marat, it would be certain evidence that such a writing could not have been written till after the year 1793." This is a wrong conclusion. Suppose some hot republican should at this day publish a new edition of any old history of France, and instead of Havre-de-Grace should write Havre-Marat; and that two or three thousand years hence, a man, like yourself, should, on that account, reject

the whole history as spurious, would he be justified in so doing: Would it not be reasonable to tell him—that the name Havre-Marat had been inserted, not by the original author of the history, but by a subsequent editor of it; and to refer him, for a proof of the genuineness of the book, to the testimony of the whole French nation? This supposition so obviously applies to your difficulty, that I cannot but recommend it to your impartial attention. But if this solution does not please you, I desire it may be proved, that the *Dan*, mentioned in Genesis, was the same town as the *Dan*, mentioned in Judges. I desire, further, to have it proved, that the Dan, mentioned in Genesis, was the name of a town, and not of a river. It is merely said—Abraham pursued the enemies of Lot, to Dan. Now a river was full as likely as a town to stop a pursuit. *Lot*, we know, was settled in the plain of *Jordan;* and Jordan, we know, was composed of the united streams of two rivers, called *Jor* and *Dan*.

Your next difficulty respects its being said in Genesis—"These are the kings that reigned in *Edom* before there reigned any king over the children of Israel:—this passage could only have been written, you say, (and I think you say rightly), after the first king began to reign over Israel; so far from being written by Moses, it could not have been written till the time of Saul at the least." I admit this inference, but I deny its application. A small addition to a book does not destroy either the genuineness or the authenticity of the whole book. I am not ignorant of the manner in which commentators have answered this objection of Spinoza, without making

the concession which I have made; but I have no scruple in admitting, that the passage in question, consisting of nine verses, containing the genealogy of some kings of Edom, might have been inserted in the book of Genesis, after the book of Chronicles (which was called in Greek by a name importing that it contained things left out in other books) was written. The learned have shewn, that interpolations have happened to other books; but these insertions by other hands have never been considered as invalidating the authority of those books.

Take away from Genesis," you say, "the belief that Moses was the author, on which only the strange belief that it is the word of God has stood, and there remains nothing of Genesis but an anonymous book of stories, fables, traditionary or invented absurdities, or of downright lies." What! is it a story then, that the world had a beginning, and that the author of it was God? If you deem this a story, I am not disputing with a deistical philosopher, but with an atheistic madman. Is it a story, that our first parents fell from a paradisiacal state—that this earth was destroyed by a deluge—that Noah and his family were preserved in the ark, and that the world has been re-peopled by his descendants?—Look into a book so common that almost every body has it, and so excellent that no person ought to be without it—Grotius on the truth of the christian religion—and you will there meet with abundant testimony to the truth of all the principal facts recorded in Genesis. The testimony is not that of Jews, Christians, and priests; it is the testimony of the philosophers, historians, and poets

of antiquity. The oldest book in the world is Genesis; and it is remarkable that those books which come nearest to it in age, are those which make either the most distinct mention, or the most evident allusion to the facts related in Genesis concerning the formation of the world from a chaotic mass, the primeval innocence and subsequent fall of man, the longevity of mankind in the first ages of the world, the depravity of the antediluvians, and the destruction of the world. Read the tenth chapter of Genesis—It may appear to you to contain nothing but an uninteresting narration of the descendants of *Shem*, *Ham*, and *Japheth;* a mere fable, an invented absurdity, a downright lie. No, sir, it is one of the most valuable, and the most venerable records of antiquity. It explains what all profane historians were ignorant of—the origin of nations. Had it told us, as other books do, that one nation sprung out of the earth they inhabited; another from a cricket or a grasshopper; another from an oak; another from a mushroom; another from a dragon's tooth; then indeed it would have merited the appellation you, with so much temerity, bestow upon it. Instead of these absurdities, it gives such an account of peopling the earth after the deluge, as no other book in the world ever did give; and the truth of which all other books in the world, which contain any thing on the subject, confirm. The last verse of the chapter says, "These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth, after the flood." It would require great learning to trace out, precisely, either

the actual situation of all the countries in which these founders of empires settled, or to ascertain the extent of their dominions. This, however, has been done by various authors, to the satisfaction of all competent judges; so much at least to my satisfaction, that had I no other proof of the authenticity of Genesis, I should consider this as sufficient. But, without the aid of learning, any man who can barely read his Bible, and has but heard of such people as the *Assyrians*, the *Elamites*, the *Lydians*, the *Medes*, the *Ionians*, the *Thracians*, will readily acknowledge that they had *Assur*, and *Elam*, and *Lud*, and *Madai*, and *Javan*, and *Tiras*, grandsons of *Noah*, for their respective founders; and knowing this, he will not, I hope, part with his Bible, as a system of fables. I am no enemy to philosophy; but when philosophy would rob me of my Bible, I must say of it, as Cicero said of the twelve tables,—This little book alone exceeds the libraries of all the philosophers in the weight of its authority, and in the extent of its utility.

From the abuse of the Bible, you proceed to that of Moses, and again bring forward the subject of his wars in the land of Canaan. There are many men who look upon all war (would to God that all men saw it in the same light) with extreme abhorrence, as afflicting mankind with calamities not necessary, shocking to humanity, and repugnant to reason. But is it repugnant to reason that God should, by an express act of his Providence, destroy a wicked nation? I am fond of considering the goodness of God as the leading principle of his conduct towards mankind, of considering his justice

as subservient to his mercy. He punishes individuals and nations with the rod of his wrath ; but I am persuaded that all his punishments originate in his abhorrence of sin ; are calculated to lessen its influence : and are proofs of his goodness ; inasmuch as it may not be possible for Omnipotence itself to communicate supreme happiness to the human race, whilst they continue servants of sin. The destruction of the Canaanites exhibits to all nations, in all ages, a signal proof of God's displeasure against sin ; it has been to others, and it is to ourselves, a benevolent warning. Moses would have been the wretch you represent him, had he acted by his own authority alone : but you may as reasonably attribute cruelty and murder to the judge of the land in condemning criminals to death, as butchery and massacre to Moses in executing the command of God.

The Midianites, through the counsel of Balaam, and by the vicious instrumentality of their women, had seduced a part of the Israelites to idolatry ; to the impure worship of their infamous god Baalpeor : for this offence, twenty-four thousand Israelites had perished in a plague from heaven, and Moses received a command from God " to smite the Midianites who had beguiled the people. An army was equipped, and sent against Midian. When the army returned victorious, Moses and the princes of the congregation, went to meet it ; " and Moses was wroth with the officers." He observed the women captives, and he asked with astonishment, " Have ye saved all the women alive ? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the

matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation." He then gave an order that the boys and the women should be put to death, but that the young maidens should be kept alive for themselves. I see nothing in this proceeding, but good policy, combined with mercy. The young men might have become dangerous avengers of what they would esteem their country's wrongs; the mothers might have again allured the Israelites to the love of licentious pleasures, and the practice of idolatry, and brought another plague upon the congregation; but the young maidens not being polluted by the flagitious habits of their mothers, nor likely to create disturbance by rebellion, were kept alive. You give a different turn to the matter; you say "that thirty-two thousand women-children were consigned to debauchery by the order of Moses." Prove this and I will allow that Moses was the horrid monster you make him—prove this, and I will allow that the Bible is what you call it—"a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy"—prove this, or excuse my warmth if I say to you, as Paul said to Elymas the sorcerer, who sought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith, "O full of all subtlety and of all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" I did not when I began these letters, think that I should have been moved to this severity of rebuke, by any thing you could have written; but when so gross a misrepresentation is made of God's proceedings, coolness would be a crime. The women-children were not reserved for the purposes of

debauchery, but of slavery; a custom abhorrent from our manners, but every where practised in former times, and still practised in countries where the benignity of the christian religion has not softened the ferocity of human nature. You here admit a part of the account given in the Bible respecting the expedition against Midian to be a true account; it is not unreasonable to desire that you will admit the whole, or show sufficient reason why you admit one part, and reject the other. I will mention the part to which you have paid no attention. The Israelitish army consisted but of twelve thousand men, a mere handful when opposed to the people of Midian; yet, when the officers made a muster of their troops after their return from the war, they found they had not lost a single man! This circumstance struck them as so decisive an evidence of God's interposition, that out of the spoils they had taken, they offered "an oblation to the Lord, an atonement for their souls." Do but believe what the captains of thousands, and the captains of hundreds, believed at the time when these things happened, and we shall never more hear of your objections to the Bible, from its account of the wars of Moses.

You produce two or three other objections respecting the genuineness of the first five books of the Bible. I cannot stop to notice them: every commentator answers them in a manner suited to the apprehension of even a mere English reader. You calculate, to the thousandth part of an inch, the length of the iron bed of *Og* the king of Bashan; but you do not prove that the bed was too big for the body,

or that a Patagonian would have been lost in it. You make no allowance for the size of a royal bed; nor ever suspect that king Og might have been possessed with the same kind of vanity, which occupied the mind of king Alexander, when he ordered his soldiers to enlarge the size of their beds, that they might give the Indians, in succeeding ages, a great idea of the prodigious stature of a Macedonian. In many parts of your work you speak much in commendation of science. I join with you in every commendation you can give it: but you speak of it in such a manner as gives room to believe, that you are a great proficient in it; if this be the case, I would recommend a problem to your attention, the solution of which you will readily allow to be far above the powers of a man conversant only, as you represent priests and bishops to be, in *hic, hæc, hoc.* The problem is this—to determine the height to which a human body, preserving its similarity of figure, may be augmented, before it will perish by its own weight. When you have solved this problem, we shall know whether the bed of the king of Bashan was too big for any giant; whether the existence of a man twelve or fifteen feet high is in the nature of things impossible. My philosophy teaches me to doubt of many things; but it does not teach me to reject every testimony which is opposite to my experience: had I been born in Shetland, I could, on proper testimony, have believed in the existence of the Lincolnshire ox, or of the largest dray-horse in London; though the oxen and horses in Shetland had not been bigger than mastiffs.

LETTER IV.

HAVING finished your objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you proceed to your remarks on the book of Joshua; and from its internal evidence, you endeavour to prove, that this book was not written by Joshua—What then? what is your conclusion?—"that it is anonymous, and without authority." Stop a little; your conclusion is not connected with your premises; your friend Euclid would have been ashamed of it. "Anonymous, and therefore without authority!" I have noticed this solecism before; but as you frequently bring it forward, and, indeed, your book stands much in need of it, I will submit to your consideration another observation on the subject. The book called Fleta is anonymous; but it is not on that account without authority. Domesday book is anonymous, and was written above seven hundred years ago; yet our courts of law do not hold it to be without authority, as to the facts related in it. Yes, you will say, but this book has been preserved with singular care amongst the records of the nation. And who told you that the Jews had no records, or that they did not preserve them with singular care? Josephus says the contrary: and, in the Bible itself, an appeal is made

to many books, which have perished: such as the book of Jasher, the book of Nathan, of Abijah, of Iddo, of Jehu, of natural history by Solomon, of the acts of Manasseh, and others which might be mentioned. If any one, having access to the journals of the Lords and Commons, to the books of the treasury, war-office, privy council, and other public documents, should at this day write an history of the reigns of George the first and second, and should publish it without his name, would any man, three or four hundreds or thousands of years hence, question the authority of that book, when he knew that the whole British nation had received it as an authentic book from the time of its first publication to the age in which he lived? This supposition is in point. The books of the Old Testament were composed from the records of the Jewish nation, and they have been received as true by that nation, from the time in which they were written to the present day. Dodsley's Annual Register is an anonymous book, we only know the name of its editor; the New Annual Register is an anonymous book; the Reviews are anonymous books; but do we, or will our posterity, esteem these books of no authority? On the contrary, they are admitted at present, and will be received in after ages, as authoritative records of the civil, military, and literary history of England and of Europe. So little foundation is there for our being startled by your assertion, "It is anonymous and without authority."

If I am right in this reasoning (and I protest to you that I do not see any error in it,) all the arguments you adduce in proof that the book of Joshua

was not written by Joshua, nor that of Samuel by Samuel, are nothing to the purpose for which you have brought them forward; these books may be books of authority, though all you advance against the genuineness of them should be granted. No article of faith is injured by allowing that there is no such positive proof, when or by whom these, and some other books of holy scripture, were written, as to exclude all possibility of doubt and cavil. There is no necessity, indeed, to allow this. The chronological and historical difficulties, which others before you have produced, have been answered, and as to the greatest part of them, so well answered, that I will not waste the reader's time by entering into a particular examination of them.

You make yourself merry with what you call the tale of the sun standing still upon mount Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon; and you say that "the story detects itself, because there is not a nation in the world that knows any thing about it." How can you expect that there should, when there is not a nation in the world whose annals reach this era by many hundred years? It happens, however, that you are probably mistaken as to the fact: a confused tradition concerning this miracle, and a similar one in the time of Ahaz, when the sun went back ten degrees, has been preserved amongst one of the most ancient nations, as we are informed by one of the most ancient historians. Herodotus, in his Euterpe, speaking of the Egyptian priests, says, "They told me that the sun had four times deviated from his course, having twice risen where he uniformly goes down, and twice gone down where

he uniformly rises. This however had produced no alteration in the climate of Egypt ; the fruits of the earth, and the phenomena of the Nile had always been the same." (Beloe's Transl.) The last part of this observation confirms the conjecture, that this account of the Egyptian priests had a reference to the two miracles respecting the sun mentioned in scripture ; for they were not of that kind, which could introduce any change in climates or seasons. You would have been contented to admit the account of this miracle as a fine piece of poetical imagery ; you may have seen some Jewish doctors, and some christian commentators, who consider it as such ; but improperly in my opinion. I think it idle, at least, if not impious, to undertake to explain how the miracle was performed ; but one who is not able to explain the mode of doing a thing, argues ill if he thence infers that the thing was not done. We are perfectly ignorant how the sun was formed, how the planets were projected at the creation, how they are still retained in their orbits by the power of gravity ; but we admit, notwithstanding, that the sun was formed, that the planets were then projected, and that they are still retained in their orbits. The machine of the universe is in the hand of God ; he can stop the motion of any part, or of the whole of it, with less trouble and less danger of injuring it, than you can stop your watch. In testimony of the reality of the miracle, the author of the book says—" Is not this written in the book of Jasher ?" No author in his senses would have appealed, in proof of his veracity, to a book which did not exist, or in attestation of a fact which, though

it did exist, was not recorded in it; we may safely therefore conclude, that, at the time the book of Joshua was written, there was such a book as the book of Jasher, and that the miracle of the sun's standing still was recorded in that book. But this observation, you will say, does not prove the fact of the sun's having stood still: I have not produced it as a proof of that fact; but it proves that the author of the book of Joshua believed the fact, that the people of Israel admitted the authority of the book of Jasher. An appeal to a fabulous book would have been as senseless an insult upon their understanding, as it would have been to ours, had Rapin appealed to the Arabian Night's Entertainment, as a proof of the battle of Hastings.

I cannot attribute much weight to your argument against the genuineness of the book of Joshua, from its being said that, "Joshua burned Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation unto *this day*." Joshua lived twenty-four years after the burning of Ai: and if he wrote his history in the latter part of his life, what absurdity is there in saying, Ai is still in ruins, or Ai is in ruins to this very day? A young man, who had seen the heads of the rebels, in forty-five, when they were first stuck upon poles at Temple-Bar, might, twenty years afterwards, in attestation of his veracity in speaking of the fact, have justly said—and they are there to this very day. Whoever wrote the gospel of St. Matthew, it was written not many centuries, probably (I had almost said certainly) not a quarter of one century after the death of Jesus; yet the author, speaking of the potter's field which had been purchased by

the chief priests with the money they had given Judas to betray his master, says, that it was therefore called the field of blood *unto this day;* and in another place he says, that the story of the body of Jesus being stolen out of the sepulchre, was commonly reported among the Jews *until this day.* Moses, in his old age, had made use of a similar expression, when he put the Israelites in mind of what the Lord had done to the Egyptians in the Red Sea, "The Lord hath destroyed them unto this day." (Deut. xi. 4.)

In the last chapter of the book of Joshua it is related that Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel to Shechem; and there, in the presence of the elders and principal men of Israel, he recapitulated, in a short speech, all that God had done for their nation, from the calling of Abraham to that time, when they were settled in the land which God had promised to their forefathers. In finishing his speech, he said to them, "Choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods." Joshua urged farther, that God would not suffer them to worship other gods in fellowship with him; they answered, that "they would serve the Lord." Joshua then said to them, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses." Here was a solemn cov-

enant between Joshua, on the part of the Lord, and all the men of Israel, on their own part. The text then says, "So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem, *and Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God.*" Here is a proof of two things—first, that there was then, a few years after the death of Moses, existing, a book called The Book of the Law of God; the same, without doubt, which Moses had written, and committed to the custody of the Levites, that it might be kept in the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it might be a witness against them—secondly, that Joshua *wrote* a part at least of his own transactions in that very book, as an addition to it. It is not a proof that he wrote all his own transactions in any book; but I submit entirely to the judgment of every candid man, whether this proof of his having recorded a very material transaction, does not make it probable that he recorded other material transactions; that he wrote the chief part of the book of Joshua; and that such things as happened after his death, have been inserted in it by others, in order to render the history more complete.

The book of Joshua, chap. vi. ver. 26, is quoted in the first book of Kings, chap. xvi. 34. "In his (Ahab's) days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun." Here is a proof that the book of Joshua is older than the first book of Kings; but that is not all which may

reasonably be inferred, I do not say proved, from this quotation. It may be inferred from the phrase —according to the word of the Lord which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun—that Joshua *wrote down* the word which the Lord had spoken. In Baruch, (which, though an apocryphal book, is authority for this purpose) there is a similar phrase —as thou spakest by thy servant Moses in the day when thou didst command him *to write thy law.*

I think it unnecessary to make any observation on what you say relative to the book of Judges; but I cannot pass unnoticed your censure of the book of Ruth, which you call "an idle, bungling story, foolishly told, nobody knows by whom, about a strolling country girl creeping slily to bed to her cousin Boaz; pretty stuff, indeed," you exclaim, "to be called the word of God!" It seems to me that you do not perfectly comprehend what is meant by the expression—the word of God, or the divine authority of the scriptures:—I will explain it to you in the words of Dr Law, late bishop of Carlisle, and in those of St Austin. My first quotation is from bishop Law's Theory of Religion, a book not undeserving your notice.—"The true sense then of the *divine authority* of the books of the Old Testament, and which perhaps is enough to denominate them in general *divinely inspired*, seems to be this; that as in those times God has all along, beside the inspection, or superintendency of his general providence, interfered upon particular occasions, by giving express commissions to some persons (thence called *prophets*) to declare his will in various manners, and degrees of evi-

dence, as best suited the occasion, time, and nature of the subject; and in all other cases, left them wholly to themselves: in like manner, he has interposed his more immediate assistance, (and notified it to them, as they did to the world,) in the *recording* of these revelations; so far as that was necessary, amidst the common (but from hence termed *sacred*) history of those times; and mixed with various other occurrences; in which the historian's own natural qualifications were sufficient to enable him to relate things with all the accuracy they required." The passage from St Austin is this: "I am of opinion, that those men to whom the Holy Ghost revealed what ought to be received as authoritative in religion, might write some things as men with historical diligence, and other things as prophets by divine inspiration; and that these things are so distinct, that the former may be attributed to themselves as contributing to the increase of knowledge, and the latter to God speaking by them things appertaining to the authority of religion." Whether this opinion be right or wrong, I do not here inquire; it is the opinion of many learned men and good Christians: and, if you will adopt it as your opinion, you will see cause, perhaps, to become a Christian yourself; and you will see cause to consider chronological, geographical, or genealogical errors, apparent mistakes or real contradictions as to historical facts, needless repetitions and trifling interpolations—indeed you will see cause to consider all the principal objections of your book to be absolutely without foundation. Receive but the Bible as composed by upright and well inform-

ed, though, in some points, fallible men, (for I exclude all fallibility when they profess to deliver the word of God, and you must receive it as a book revealing to you, in many parts, the express will of God; and in other parts, relating to you the ordinary history of the times. Give but the authors of the Bible that credit which you give to other historians; believe them to deliver the word of God, when they tell you that they do so; believe, when they relate other things as of themselves and not of the Lord, that they wrote to the best of their knowledge and capacity, and you will be in your belief something very different from a deist: you may not be allowed to aspire to the character of an orthodox believer, but you will not be an unbeliever in the divine authority of the Bible; though you should admit human mistakes and human opinions to exist in some parts of it. This I take to be the first step towards the removal of the doubts of many sceptical men; and when they are advanced thus far, the grace of God assisting a teachable disposition, and a pious intention, may carry them on to perfection.

As to Ruth you do an injury to her character. She was not a strolling country girl. She had been married ten years; and being left a widow without children, she accompanied her mother-in-law, returning into her native country, out of which with her husband and her two sons she had been driven by a famine. The disturbances in France have driven many men with their families to America: if, ten years hence, a woman, having lost her husband and her children, should return to France

with a daughter-in-law, would you be justified in calling the daughter-in-law a strolling country girl? —"but she crept slily to bed to her cousin Boaz." —I do not find it in the history—as a person imploring protection, she laid herself down at the foot of an aged kinsman's bed, and she rose up with as much innocence as she had laid herself down. She was afterwards married to Boaz, and reputed by all her neighbours as a virtuous woman; and they were more likely to know her character than you are. Whoever reads the book of Ruth, bearing in mind the simplicity of ancient manners, will find it an interesting story, of a poor young woman, following in a strange land the advice, and affectionately attaching herself to the fortunes of the mother of her deceased husband.

The two books of Samuel come next under your review. You proceed to show that these books were not written by Samuel, that they are anonymous, and thence you conclude without authority. I need not here repeat what I have said upon the fallacy of your conclusion; and as to your proving that the books were not written by Samuel, you might have spared yourself some trouble if you had recollected, it is generally admitted, that Samuel did not write any part of the second book which bears his name, and only a part of the first. It would indeed have been an inquiry not undeserving your notice, in many parts of your work, to have examined what was the the opinion of learned men respecting the authors of the several books of the Bible; you would have found, that you were in many places fighting a phantom of your own rais-

ing, and proving what was generally admitted. Very little certainty, I think, can at this time be obtained on this subject: but that you may have some knowledge of what has been conjectured by men of judgment, I will quote to you a passage from Dr Hartley's observations on man. The author himself does not vouch for the truth of his observation, for he begins it with a supposition.—"I suppose then, that the Pentateuch consists of the writings of *Moses*, put together by *Samuel*, with a very few additions; that the books of Joshua and Judges were in like manner collected by him; and the book of Ruth, with the first part of the first book of Samuel, written by him; that the latter part of the first book of Samuel, and the second book, were written by the prophets who succeeded Samuel, suppose *Nathan* and *Gad;* that the books of Kings and Chronicles, are extracts from the records of the succeeding prophets, concerning their own times, and from the public genealogical tables, made by *Ezra;* that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are collections of like records, some written by *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, and some by their predecessors; that the book of Esther was written by some eminent Jew, in or near the times of the transaction there recorded, perhaps *Mordecai;* the book of Job by a Jew of an uncertain time; the Psalms by *David*, and other pious persons; the books of Proverbs and Canticles by *Solomon;* the book of Ecclesiastes by *Solomon*, or perhaps by a Jew of later times, speaking in his person, but not with an intention to make him pass for the author; the prophecies by the prophets whose name, they

bear; and the books of the New Testament by the persons to whom they are usually ascribed."—I have produced this passage to you, not merely to show you that, in a great part of your work, you are attacking what no person is interested in defending; but to convince you, that a wise and good man, and a firm believer in revealed religion, for such was Dr Hartley, and no priest, did not reject the anonymous books of the Old Testament as books without authority. I shall not trouble either you or myself with any more observations on that head; you may ascribe the two books of Kings, and the two books of Chronicles, to what authors you please; I am satisfied with knowing that the annals of the Jewish nation were written in the time of Samuel, and, probably in all succeeding times, by men of ability, who lived in or near the times of which they write. Of the truth of this observation we have abundant proof, not only from the testimony of Josephus, and of the writers of the Talmuds, but from the Old Testament itself. I will content myself with citing a few places—"Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer." 1 Chron. xxix. 29.—"Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophesy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer?" 2 Chron. ix. 29.—"Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer, concerning genealogies?" 2 Chron.

xii. 15.—"Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani." 2 Chron. xx. 34. Is it possible for writers to give a stronger evidence of their veracity, than by referring their readers to the books from which they had extracted the materials of their history?

"The two books of Kings," you say, "are little more than an history of assassinations, treachery, and war." That the kings of Israel and Judah were many of them very wicked persons, is evident from the history which is given of them in the Bible; but it ought to be remembered, that their wickedness is not to be attributed to their religion: nor were the people of Israel chosen to be the people of God, on account of their wickedness; nor was their being chosen, a cause of it. One may wonder, indeed, that, having experienced so many singular marks of God's goodness towards their nation, they did not at once become, and continue to be, (what, however, they have long been,) strenuous advocates for the worship of one only God, the maker of heaven and earth. This was the purpose for which they were chosen, and this purpose has been accomplished. For above three and twenty hundred years the Jews have uniformly witnessed to all the nations of the earth the unity of God, and his abomination of idolatry. But as you look upon "the appellation of the Jews being God's *chosen* people as a *lie* which the priests and leaders of the Jews had invented to cover the baseness of their own characters, and which christian priests, sometimes as corrupt, and often as cruel, have pro-

fessed to believe," I will plainly state to you the reasons which induce me to believe that it is no *lie*, and I hope they will be such reasons as you will not attribute either to cruelty or corruption.

To any one contemplating the universality of things, and the fabric of nature, this globe of earth, with the men dwelling on its surface, will not appear (exclusive of the divinity of their souls) of more importance than an hillock of ants; all of which, some with corn, some with eggs, some without any thing, run hither and thither, bustling about a little heap of dust.—This is a thought of the immortal Bacon; and it is admirably fitted to humble the pride of philosophy, attempting to prescribe forms to the proceedings, and bounds to the attributes of God. We may as easily circumscribe infinity, as penetrate the secret purposes of the Almighty. There are but two ways by which I can acquire any knowledge of the nature of the Supreme Being—by reason, and by revelation; to you, who reject revelation, there is but one. Now my reason informs me, that God has made a great difference between the kinds of animals, with respect to their capacity of enjoying happiness. Every kind is perfect in its order; but if we compare different kinds together, one will appear to be greatly superior to another. An animal, which has but one sense, has but one source of happiness; but if it be supplied with what is suited to that sense, it enjoys all the happiness of which it is capable, and is in its nature perfect. Other sorts of animals, which have two or three senses, and which have also abundant means of

gratifying them, enjoy twice or thrice as much happiness as those do which have but one. In the same sort of animals there is a great difference amongst individuals, one having the senses more perfect, and the body less subject to disease, than another. Hence, if I were to form a judgment of the divine goodness by this use of my reason, I could not but say that it was partial and unequal.—"What shall we say then? Is God unjust? God forbid!" His goodness may be unequal, without being imperfect; it must be estimated from the whole and not from a part. Every order of beings is so sufficient for its own happiness, and so conducive at the same time to the happiness of every other, that in one view it seems to be made for itself alone, and in another not for itself but for every other. Could we comprehend the whole of the immense fabric which God hath formed, I am persuaded that we should see nothing but perfection, harmony, and beauty, in every part of it; but whilst we dispute about parts, we neglect the whole, and discern nothing but supposed anomalies and defects. The maker of a watch, or the builder of a ship, is not to be blamed because a spectator cannot discover either the beauty or the use of the disjointing parts. And shall we dare to accuse God of injustice, for not having distributed the gifts of nature in the same degree to all kinds of animals, when it is probable that this very inequality of distribution may be the mean of producing the greatest sum total of happiness to the whole system? In exactly the same manner may we reason concerning the acts of

God's especial providence. If we consider any one act, such as that of appointing the Jews to be his peculiar people, as unconnected with every other, it may appear to be a partial display of his goodness; it may excite doubts concerning the wisdom or the benignity of his divine nature. But if we connect the history of the Jews with that of other nations, from the most remote antiquity to the present time, we shall discover that they were not chosen so much for their own benefit, or on account of their own merit, as for the general benefit of mankind. To the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Grecians, Romans, to all the people of the earth, they were formerly, and they are still to all civilized nations, a beacon set upon an hill, to warn them from idolatry, to light them to the sanctuary of a God holy, just, and good. Why should we suspect such a dispensation of being a *lie?* when even from the little which we can understand of it, we see that it is founded in wisdom, carried on for the general good, and analogous to all that reason teaches us concerning the nature of God.

Several things, you observe, are mentioned in the book of the Kings, such as the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, the ascent of Elijah into heaven, the destruction of the children who mocked Elisha, and the resurrection of a dead man;—these circumstances being mentioned in the book of Kings, and not mentioned in that of Chronicles, is a proof to you that they are lies. I esteem it a very erroneous mode of reasoning, which, from the silence of one author concerning a particular circumstance, infers the want of veracity in another

who mentions it, and this observation is still more cogent, when applied to a book which is only a supplement to, or an abridgment of other books: and under this description the book of Chronicles has been considered by all writers. But though you will not believe the miracle of the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, what can you say to the prophecy which was then delivered concerning the future destruction of the idolatrous altar of Jeroboam? The prophecy is thus written, 1 Kings, xiii. 2.—"Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee (the altar) shall he offer the priests of the high places." Here is a clear prophecy; the name, family, and office of a particular person are described in the year 975 (according to the Bible chronology) before Christ. Above 350 years after the delivery of the prophecy, you will find, by consulting the second book of Kings, (chap. xxiii. 15, 16,) this prophecy fulfilled in all its parts.

You make a calculation that Genesis was not written till 800 years after Moses, and that it is of the same age, and you may probably think of the same authority as Æsop's Fables. You give, what you call the evidence of this, the air of a demonstration—"It has but two stages:—first, the account of the kings of Edom, mentioned in Genesis, is taken from Chronicles, and therefore the book of Genesis was written after the book of Chronicles:—secondly, the book of Chronicles was not begun to be written, till after Zedekiah, in whose time Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, 588 years before Christ, and more than 860 after

Moses."—Having answered this objection before, I might be excused taking any more notice of it; but as you build much, in this place, upon the strength of your argument, I will show you its weakness when it is properly stated.—A *few verses* in the book of Genesis could not be written by Moses; *therefore no part* of Genesis could be written by Moses:—a child would deny your *therefore*.—Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written by *Moses*, because they speak of kings of Israel, there having been no kings of Israel in the time of Moses; and *therefore* they could not be written by *Samuel*, or by *Solomon*, or any other person who lived after there were kings in Israel, except by the author of the book of Chronicles:—this is also an illegitimate inference from your position.—Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis are, word for word, the same as a few verses in the book of Chronicles:—*therefore* the author of the book of Genesis must have taken them from Chronicles:—another lame conclusion! Why might not the author of the book of Chronicles have taken them from Genesis, as he has taken many other genealogies, supposing them to have been inserted in Genesis by Samuel? But where, you may ask, could Samuel or any other person, have found the account of the kings of Edom? Probably, in the public records of the nation, which was certainly as open for inspection to Samuel, and the other prophets, as they were to the author of Chronicles. I hold it needless to employ more time on the subject.

LETTER V.

At length you come to two books, Ezra and Nehemiah, which you will allow to be genuine books, giving an account of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, about 536 years before Christ; but then you say, "Those accounts are nothing to us, nor to any other persons, unless it be to the Jews, as a part of the history of their nation: and there is just as much of the word of God in those books, as there is in any of the histories of France, or in Rapin's history of England." Here let us stop a moment, and try if from your own concessions it be not possible to confute your argument. Ezra and Nehemiah, you grant, are genuine books —"but they are nothing to us!" The very first verse of Ezra says—the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled;—is this nothing to us, to know that Jeremiah was a true prophet? Do but grant that the Supreme Being communicated to any of the sons of men a knowledge of future events, so that their predictions were plainly verified, and you will find little difficulty in admitting the truth of revealed religion. Is it nothing to us to know that, five hundred and thirty-six years before Christ, the books of Chronicles, Kings, Judges, Joshua, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus, Exodus, Genesis, every

book, the authority of which you have attacked, are all referred to by Ezra and Nehemiah, as authentic books, containing the history of the Israelitish nation from Abraham to the very time?—Is it nothing to us to know that the history of the Jews is true?—It is every thing to us: for if that history be not true, Christianity must be false. The Jews are the root, we are branches "grafted in amongst them;" to them pertain "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."

The history of the Old Testament has, without doubt, some difficulties in it; but a minute philosopher, who busies himself in searching them out, whilst he neglects to contemplate the harmony of all its parts, the wisdom and goodness of God displayed throughout the whole, appears to me to be like a purblind man, who, in surveying a picture, objects to the simplicity of the design, and the beauty of the execution, from the asperities he has discovered in the canvas and the colouring. The history of the Old Testament, notwithstanding the real difficulties which occur in it, notwithstanding the scoffs and cavils of unbelievers, appears to me to have such internal evidences of its truth, to be so corroborated by the most ancient profane histories, so confirmed by the present circumstances of the world, that if I were not a Christian, I would become a Jew. You think this history to be a collection of lies, contradictions, blasphemies: I look

upon it to be the oldest, the truest, the most comprehensive, and the most important history in the world. I consider it as giving more satisfactory proofs of the being and attributes of God, of the origin and end of human kind, than ever was attained by the deepest researches of the most enlightened philosophers. The exercise of our reason in the investigation of truths respecting the nature of God, and the future expectations of human kind, is highly useful; but I hope I shall be pardoned by the metaphysicians in saying that the chief utility of such disquisitions consists in this—that they bring us acquainted with the weakness of our intellectual faculties. I do not presume to measure other men by my standard; you may have clearer notions than I am able to form of the infinity of space; of the eternity of duration; of necessary existence; of the connexion between necessary existence and intelligence; between intelligence and benevolence: you may see nothing in the universe but organized matter; or, rejecting a material, you may see nothing but an ideal world. With a mind weary of conjecture, fatigued by doubt, sick of disputation, eager for knowledge, anxious for certainty, and unable to attain it by the best use of my reason in matters of the utmost importance, I have long ago turned my thoughts to an impartial examination of the proofs on which revealed religion is grounded, and I am convinced of its truth. This examination is a subject within the reach of human capacity: you have come to one conclusion respecting it, I have come to another; both of us cannot be right; may God forgive him that is in an error.

You ridicule, in a note, the story of an angel appearing to Joshua. Your mirth you will perceive to be misplaced, when you consider the design of this appearance; it was to assure Joshua, that the same God, who had appeared to Moses, ordering him to pull off his shoes, because he stood on holy ground, had how appeared to himself. Was this no encouragement to a man who was about to engage in war with many nations? Had it no tendency to confirm his faith? Was it no lesson to him to obey, in all things, the commands of God, and to give the glory of his conquests to the author of them, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? As to your wit about pulling off the shoe, it originates, I think, in your ignorance; you ought to have known, that this rite was an an indication of reverence for the divine presence; and that the custom of entering barefoot into their temples subsists, in some countries, to this day.

You allow the book of Ezra to be a genuine book; but that the author of it may not escape without a blow, you say, that in matters of record it is not to be depended on, and as a proof of your assertion, you tell us that the total amount of the numbers who returned from Babylon does not correspond with the particulars; and that every child may have an argument for its infidelity, you display the particulars, and show your own skill in arithmetic, by summing them up. And can you suppose that Ezra, a man of great learning, knew so little of science, so little of the lowest branch of science, that he could not give his readers the sum total of sixty particular sums? You know undoubted-

ly, that the Hebrew letters denoted also numbers; and that there was such a great similarity between some of these letters, that it was extremely easy for a transcriber of a manuscript to mistake a ב for כ (or 2 for 20) a ג for נ (or 3 for 50), a ד for a ר (or 4 for 200). Now what have we to do with numerical contradictions in the Bible, but to attribute them, wherever they occur, to this obvious source of error—the inattention of the transcriber in writing one letter for another that was like it?

I should extend these letters to a length troublesome to the reader, to you, and to myself, if I answered minutely every objection you have made, and rectified every error into which you have fallen; it may be sufficient briefly to notice some of the chief.

The character represented in Job under the name of Satan is, you say, "the first and only time this name is mentioned in the Bible." Now I find this name, as denoting an enemy, frequently occurring in the Old Testament; thus 2 Sam. xix. 22. "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me?" In the original it is satans unto me. Again, 1 Kings v. 4. "The Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent"—in the original, neither satan nor evil. I need not mention other places; these are sufficient to show, that the word satan, denoting an adversary, does occur in various places of the Old Testament: and it is extremely probable to me, that the root satan was introduced in the Hebrew and other eastern languages, to denote an adversary, from its having been the proper name of the

great enemy of mankind. I know it is an opinion of Voltaire, that the word satan is not older than the Babylonian captivity: this is a mistake, for it is met with in the hundred and ninth Psalm, which all allow to be written by David, long before the captivity. Now we are upon this subject, permit me to recommend to your consideration the universality of the doctrine concerning an evil being, who, in the beginning of time had opposed himself, who still continues to oppose himself, to the supreme source of all good. Amongst all nations, in all ages, this opinion prevailed, that human affairs were subject to the will of the gods, and regulated by their interposition. Hence has been derived whatever we have read of the wandering stars of the Chaldeans, two of them beneficent, and two malignant—hence the Egyptian *Typho* and *Osiris*—the Persian *Arimanias* and *Oromasdes*—the Grecians *celestial and infernal Jove*—the *Brama* and the *Zupay* of the Indians, Peruvians, Mexicans—the good and evil principle, by whatever names they may be called, of all other barbarous nations—and hence the structure of the whole book of Job, in whatever light, of history or drama, it be considered. Now does it not appear reasonable to suppose, that an opinion so ancient and so universal has arisen from tradition concerning the fall of our first parents; disfigured indeed, and obscured, as all traditions must be, by many fabulous additions?

The Jews, you tell us, "never prayed but when they were in trouble." I do not believe this of the Jews; but that they prayed more fervently when

they were in trouble, than at any other times, may be true of the Jews, and I apprehend is true of all nations and all individuals. But "the Jews never prayed for any thing but victory, vengeance, and riches."—Read Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, and blush for your assertion, illiberal and uncharitable in the extreme!

It appears, you observe, "to have been the custom of the heathens to personify both virtue and vice, by statues and images, as is done now-a-days both by statuary and by painting: but it does not follow from this that they worshipped them any more than we do." Not worshipped them! What think you of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up? Was it not worshipped by the princes, the rulers, the judges, the people, the nations, and the languages of the Babylonian empire? Not worshipped them! What think you of the decree of the Roman senate for fetching the statue of the mother of the gods from Pessinum? Was it only that they might admire it as a piece of workmanship? Not worshipped them! "What man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians was a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?" Not worshipped them!—The worship was universal. "Every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places, which the Samaritans had made—the men of Babylon made Succuth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to

Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim." (2 Kings, chap. xvii.) The heathens are much indebted to you for this curious apology for their idolatry; for a mode of worship the most cruel, senseless, impure, abominable, that can possibly disgrace the faculties of the human mind. Had this your conceit occurred in ancient times, it might have saved *Micah's teraphims*, the *golden calves of Jeroboam, and of Aaron*, and quite superseded the necessity of the second commandment!!! Heathen morality has had its advocates before you; the facetious gentleman who pulled off his hat to the statue of Jupiter, that he might have a friend when heathen idolatry should again be in repute, seems to have had some foundation for his improper humour, some knowledge that certain men esteeming themselves great philosophers had entered into a conspiracy to abolish Christianity, some foresight of the consequences which will certainly attend their success.

It is an error, you say, to call the Psalms—the Psalms of David. This error was observed by St Jerome, many hundred years before you were born; his words are, "We know that they are in an error who attribute all the Psalms to David." You, I suppose, will not deny, that David wrote some of them. Songs are of various sorts; we have hunting songs, drinking songs, fighting songs, love songs, foolish, wanton, wicked songs:—if you will have the "Psalms of David to be nothing but a collection from the different song-writers," you must allow that the writers of them were inspired by no ordinary spirit; that it is a collection, inca-

pable of being degraded by the name you give it; that it greatly excels every other collection in matter and in manner. Compare the book of Psalms with the odes of Horace or Anacreon, with the hymns of Callimachus, the golden verses of Pythagoras, the choruses of the Greek tragedians, (no contemptible compositions any of these,) and you will quickly see how greatly it surpasses them all, in piety of sentiment, in sublimity of expression, in purity of morality, and in rational theology.

As you esteem the Psalms of David a song book, it is consistent enough in you to esteem the Proverbs of Solomon a jest book; there have not come down to us above eight hundred of his jests: if we had the whole three thousand which he wrote, our mirth would become extreme. Let us open the book, and see what kind of jests it contains; take the very first as a specimen. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Do you perceive any jest in this? The fear of the Lord! What Lord does Solomon mean? He means that Lord who took the posterity of Abraham to be his peculiar people, who redeemed that people from Egyptian bondage by a miraculous interposition of his power, who gave the law to Moses, who commanded the Israelites to exterminate the nations of Canaan. Now this Lord you will not fear; the jest says, you despise wisdom and instruction. Let us try again.—"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." If your heart has been ever touched by parental feelings, you will see no jest in this. Once more—

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." These are the three first proverbs in Solomon's "jest book;" if you read it through it may not make you merry; I hope it will make you wise; that it will teach you, at least, the beginning of wisdom—the fear of that Lord, whom Solomon feared. Solomon, you tell us, was witty; jesters are sometimes witty, but though all the world, from the time of the queen of Sheba, has heard of the wisdom of Solomon, his wit was never heard of before. There is a great difference, Mr Locke teaches us, between wit and judgment, and there is a greater between wit and wisdom. Solomon "was wiser than Ethan the Ezahite, and Heman, and Chaleol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol." These men you may think jesters; and so may you call the seven wise men of Greece; but you will never convince the world that Solomon, who was wiser than them all, was nothing but a witty jester. As to the sins and debaucheries of Solomon, we have nothing to do with them but to avoid them; and to give full credit to his experience, when he preaches to us his admirable sermon on the vanity of every thing but piety and virtue.

Isaiah has a greater share of your abuse than any other writer in the Old Testament, and the reason of it is obvious—the prophecies of Isaiah have received such a full and circumstantial completion, that unless you can persuade yourself to consider the whole book (a few historical sketches excepted) "as one continued bombastical rant, full of extravagant metaphor, without application, and destitute of meaning," you must of necessity allow its divine

authority. You compare the burden of Babylon, the burden of Moab, the burden of Damascus, and the other denunciations of the prophet against cities and kingdoms, to the story "of the knight of the burning mountain," the story "of Cinderilla, &c." I may have read these stories, but I remember nothing of the subjects of them; I have read also Isaiah's burden of Babylon, and I have compared it with the past and present state of Babylon, and the comparison has made such an impression on my mind, that it will never be effaced from my memory. I shall never cease to believe that the Eternal alone, by whom things future are more distinctly known than past or present things are to man, that the eternal God alone could have dictated to the prophet Isaiah the subject of the burden of Babylon.

The latter part of the forty-fourth and the beginning of the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, are, in your opinion, so far from being written by Isaiah, that they could only have been written by some person who lived at least an hundred and fifty years after Isaiah was dead:—these chapters, you go on, "are a compliment to Cyrus, who permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity above an hundred and fifty years after the death of Isaiah:"—and is it for this, sir, that you accuse the church of audacity, and the priests of ignorance, in imposing, as you call it, this book upon the world as the writing of Isaiah? What shall be said of you, who, either designedly or ignorantly, represent one of the most clear and important prophecies in the Bible, as an his-

torical compliment, written above an hundred and fifty years after the death of the prophet?—We contend, sir, that this is a prophecy and not an history; that God called *Cyrus* by his name; declared that he should conquer Babylon; and described the means by which he should do it, above an hundred years before Cyrus was born, and when there was no probability of such an event. *Porphyry* could not resist the evidence of *Daniel's* prophecies, but by saying, that they were forged after the events predicted had taken place; *Voltaire* could not resist the evidence of the prediction of *Jesus*, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, but by saying, that the account was written after Jerusalem had been destroyed; and you, at length, (though, for aught I know, you may have had predecessors in this presumption,) unable to resist the evidence of *Isaiah's* prophecies, contend, that they are bombastical rant, without application, though the application is circumstantial; and destitute of meaning, though the meaning is so obvious, that it cannot be mistaken; and that one of the most remarkable of them is not a prophecy, but an historical compliment written after the event. We will not, sir, give up Daniel and St Matthew to the impudent assertions of Porphyry and Voltaire, nor will we give up Isaiah to your assertion. Proof, proof is what we require, and not assertion; we will not relinquish our religion, in obedience to your abusive assertion respecting the prophets of God. That the wonderful absurdity of this hypothesis may be more obvious to you, I beg you to consider that Cyrus was a Persian, had been brought up in the

religion of his country, and was probably addicted to the magian superstition of two independent beings, equal in power but different in principle, one the author of light and of all good, the other the author of darkness and all evil. Now is it probable that a captive Jew, meaning to compliment the greatest prince in the world, should be so stupid as to tell the prince his religion was a lie?—"I am the Lord, and there is none else, I form the *light*, and create *darkness*, I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things."

But if you will persevere in believing that the prophecy concerning Cyrus was written after the event, peruse the burden of Babylon; was that also written after the event? Were the Medes *then* stirred up against Babylon? Was Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees, *then* overthrown, and become as Sodom and Gomorrah? Was it *then* uninhabited? Was it *then* neither fit for the Arabian's tent nor the shepherd's fold? Did the wild beasts of the desert *then* lie there? Did the wild beasts of the islands *then* cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces? Were Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, the son and the grandson, *then* cut off? Was Babylon *then* become a possession of the bittern, and pools of water? Was it *then* swept with the besom of destruction, so swept that the world knows not now where to find it?

I am unwilling to attribute bad designs, deliberate wickedness, to you or to any man; I cannot avoid believing, that you think you have truth on your side, and that you are doing service to man-

kind in endeavoring to root out what you esteem superstition. What I blame you for is this—that you have attempted to lessen the authority of the Bible by ridicule, more than by reason; that you have brought forward every petty objection which your ingenuity could discover, or your industry pick up, from the writings of others; and without taking notice of the answers which have been repeatedly given to these objections, you urge and enforce them as if they were new. There is certainly some novelty, at least in your manner, for you go beyond all others in boldness of assertion, and in profaneness of argumentation; Bolingbroke and Voltaire must yield the palm of scurrility to Thomas Paine.

Permit me to state to you, what would, in my opinion, have been a better mode of proceeding; better suited to the character of an honest man, sincere in his endeavours to search out truth. Such a man, in reading the Bible, would, in the first place, examine whether the Bible attributed to the Supreme Being any attributes repugnant to holiness, truth, justice, goodness; whether it represented him as subject to human infirmities; whether it excluded him from the government of the world, or assigned the origin of it to chance, and an eternal conflict of atoms. Finding nothing of this kind in the Bible, (for the destruction of the Canaanites by his express command, I have shown not to be repugnant to his moral justice,) he would, in the second place, consider that the Bible being as to many of its parts, a very old book, and written by various authors, and at different and distant periods,

there might, probably, occur some difficulties and apparent contradictions in the historical part of it; he would endeavour to remove these difficulties, to reconcile these apparent contradictions, by the rules of such sound criticism as he would use in examining the contents of any other book; and if he found that most of them were of a trifling nature, arising from short additions inserted into the text as explanatory and supplemental, or from mistakes and omissions of transcribers, he would infer that all the rest were capable of being accounted for, though he was not able to do it; and he would be the more willing to make this concession, from observing, that there ran through the whole book an harmony and connexion, utterly inconsistent with every idea of forgery and deceit. He would then, in the third place, observe, that the miraculous and historical parts of this book were so intermixed, that they could not be separated; and that they must either both be true, or both false; and from finding that the historical part was as well or better authenticated than that of any other history, he would admit the miraculous part; and to confirm himself in this belief, he would advert to the prophecies; well knowing that the prediction of things to come, was as certain a proof of the divine interposition, as the performance of a miracle could be. If he should find, as he certainly would, that many ancient prophecies had been fulfilled in all their circumstances, and that some were fulfilling at this very day, he would not suffer a few seeming or real difficulties to overbalance the weight of this accumulated evidence for the truth of the Bible. Such, I presume

to think, would be a proper conduct in all those who are desirous of forming a rational and impartial judgment on the subject of revealed religion. To return.

As to your observation, that the book of Isaiah is (at least in translation) that kind of composition and false taste, which is properly called prose run mad, I have only to remark, that your taste for Hebrew poetry, even judging of it from translation, would be more correct if you would suffer yourself to be informed on the subject by Bishop Lowth, who tells you in his *Prelections*, "that a poem translated literally from the Hebrew into any other language, whilst the same forms of the sentences remain, will still retain, even as far as relates to versification, much of its native dignity, and a faint appearance of versification." [Gregory's Trans.] If this is what you mean by prose run mad, your observation may be admitted.

You explain, at some length, your notion of the misapplication made by St Matthew of the prophecy in Isaiah—"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." That passage has been handled largely and minutely by almost every commentator, and it is too important to be handled superficially by any one: I am not on the present occasion concerned to explain it. It is quoted by you to prove, and it is the only instance you produce, that Isaiah was "a lying prophet and an impostor." Now I maintain, that this very instance proves, that he was a true prophet, and no impostor. The history of the prophecy, as delivered in the seventh chapter, is this.—Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king

of Israel, made war upon Ahaz, king of Judah; not merely, or, perhaps, not at all, for the sake of plunder or the conquest of territory, but with a declared purpose of making an entire revolution in the government of Judah, of destroying the royal house of David, and of placing another family on the throne. Their purpose is thus expressed.—"Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal." Now what did the Lord commission Isaiah to say to Ahaz? did he commission him to say, the kings shall not vex thee? No.—The kings shall not conquer thee? No.—The kings shall not succeed against thee? No:—he commissioned him to say, "It (the purpose of the two kings) shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." I demand—Did it stand, did it come to pass? Was Tabeal ever made king of Judah? No. The prophecy was perfectly accomplished. You say, "Instead of these two kings failing in their attempt against Ahaz, they succeeded; Ahaz was defeated and destroyed." I deny the fact; Ahaz was defeated, but not destroyed; and even the "two hundred thousand women and sons and daughters," whom you represent as carried into captivity, were not carried into captivity; they were made captives, but they were not carried into captivity; for the chief men of Samaria, being admonished by a prophet, would not suffer Pekah to bring the captives into the land—"they rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to

eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, (some humanity, you see, amongst those Israelites, whom you everywhere represent as barbarous brutes), and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees, to their brethren." 2 Chron. xxiii, 15. The kings did fail in their attempt; their attempt was to destroy the house of David, and to make a revolution; but they made no revolution, they did not destroy the house of David, for Ahaz slept with his fathers: and Hezekiah his son, of the house of David, reigned in his stead.

LETTER VI.

After what I conceive to be a great misrepresentation of the character and conduct of Jeremiah, you bring forward an objection which Spinoza and others before you had much insisted upon, though it is an objection which neither affects the genuineness nor the authenticity of the book of Jeremiah, any more than the blunder of the bookbinder, in misplacing the sheets of your performance, would lessen its authority. The objection is, that the book of Jeremiah has been put together in a disordered state. It is acknowledged, that the order of time is not every where observed; but the cause of the confusion is not known. Some attribute it to *Baruch* collecting into one volume all the several prophecies which Jeremiah had written, and neglecting to put them in their proper places:—others think that the several parts of the work were at first properly arranged, but that through accident, or the carelessness of transcribers, they were deranged: others contend, that there is no confusion; that prophecy differs from history, in not being subject to an accurate observance of time and order. But leaving this matter to be settled by critical discussion, let us come to a matter of greater im-

portance—to your charge against Jeremiah for his duplicity, and for his false prediction. First, as to his duplicity :

Jeremiah, on account of his having boldly predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, had been thrust into a miry dungeon by the princes of Judah who sought his life; there he would have perished, had not one of the eunuchs taken compassion on him, and petitioned king Zedekiah in his favour, saying, "These men (the princes) have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, (no small testimony this of the probity of the prophet's character,) whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is like to die for hunger." On this representation Jeremiah was taken out of the dungeon by an order from the king, who soon afterwards sent privately for him, and desired him to conceal nothing from him, binding himself, by an oath, that, whatever might be the nature of his prophecy, he would not put him to death, or deliver him into the hands of the princes who sought his life. Jeremiah delivered to him the purpose of God respecting the fate of Jerusalem. The conference being ended, the king, anxious to perform his oath, to preserve the life of the prophet, dismissed him, saying, "Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee : then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king,

that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him, and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded." Thus you remark.—"This man of God, as he is called, could tell a lie, or very strongly prevaricate, for certainly he did not go to Zedekiah to make his supplication, neither did he make it." It is not said that he told the princes he *went* to make his supplication, but that he *presented* it: now it is said in the preceding chapter, that he did make the supplication, and it is probable that in his conference he renewed it; but be that as it may, I contend that Jeremiah was not guilty of duplicity, or, in more intelligible terms, that he did not violate any law of nature, or of civil society, in what he did on this occasion. He told the truth, in part, to save his life; and he was under no obligation to tell the whole to men who were certainly his enemies, and no good subjects to his king. "In a matter (says Puffendorf) which I am not *obliged* to declare to another, if I cannot, with safety, conceal the whole, I may fairly discover no more than a part." Was Jeremiah under any *obligation* to declare to the princes what had passed in his conference with the king? You may as well say that the house of lords has a right to compel privy counsellers to reveal the king's secrets. The king cannot justly require a privy counsellor to tell a lie for him; but he may require him not to divulge his *counsels* to those who have no right to know them. Now for the false prediction—I will give the description of it in your own words.

In the 34th chapter is a prophecy of Jeremiah to Zedekiah, in these words, ver. 2.—"Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will burn it with fire; and thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but thou shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon. *Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah, king of Judah; thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee, and will lament thee, saying, Ah, Lord, for I have pronounced the word, saith the Lord.*"

"Now, instead of Zedekiah beholding the eyes of the king of Babylon, and speaking with him mouth to mouth, and dying in peace, and with the burnings of odours, as at the funeral of his fathers, (as Jeremiah had declared the Lord himself had pronounced,) the reverse, according to the 52d chapter, was the case; it is there stated, verse 10, 'That the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.' What can we say of these prophets, but that they are impostors and liars?" I can say this—that the prophecy you have produced, was fulfilled in all its parts: and what then shall be said of those who call Jeremiah a liar and an impostor? Here then we are fairly at issue—you affirm that

the prophecy was not fulfilled, and I affirm that it was fulfilled in all its parts. "I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:" so says the prophet; what says the history? "They (the forces of the king of Babylon) burnt the house of God and brake down the walls of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire." (2 Chron. xxxvi. 19.) "Thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be *taken* and *delivered* into his hand;" so says the prophet; what says the history?—"The men of war fled by night and the king went the way towards the plain, and the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army were scattered from him: so they *took* the king, and *brought him up to the king of Babylon*, to Riblah." (2 Kings xxv, 5.) The prophet goes on, "Thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth."—No pleasant circumstance this to Zedekiah, who had provoked the king of Babylon by revolting from him! The history says, "The king of Babylon gave judgment upon Zedekiah," or, as it is more literally rendered from the Hebrew, "*spake judgments with him* at Riblah." The prophet concludes this part with, "And thou shalt go to Babylon;" the history says, "The king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death." Jer. lii, 11.—"Thou shalt not die by the sword." He did not die by the sword, he did not fall in battle.—"But thou shalt die in peace." He did die in peace, he neither

expired on the rack or on the scaffold ; was neither strangled nor poisoned ; no unusual fate of captive kings! he died peaceably in his bed, though that bed was in a prison.—"And with the burnings of thy fathers shall they burn odours for thee." I cannot prove from the history that this part of the prophecy was accomplished, nor can you prove that it was not. The probability is, that it was accomplished ; and I have two reasons on which I ground this probability.—Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, to say nothing of other Jews, were men of great authority in the court of the king of Babylon, before and after the commencement of the imprisonment of Zedekiah ; and Daniel continued in power till the subversion of the kingdom of Babylon by Cyrus. Now it seems to me to be very probable, that Daniel, and the other great men of the Jews, would both have inclination to request, and influence enough with the king of Babylon to obtain permission to bury their deceased prince Zedekiah, after the manner of his fathers.—But if there had been no Jews at Babylon of consequence enough to make such a request, still it is probable that the king of Babylon would have ordered the Jews to bury and lament their departed prince, after the manner of their country. Monarchs, like other men, are conscious of the instability of human condition ; and when the pomp of war has ceased, when the insolence of conquest is abated, and the fury of resentment subsided, they seldom fail to revere loyalty even in its ruins, and grant without reluctance proper obsequies to the remains of captive kings.

You profess to have been particular in treating of

the books ascribed to Isaiah and Jeremiah.—Particular! in what? You have particularized two or three passages, which you have endeavoured to represent as objectionable, and which I hope have been shown, to the reader's satisfaction, to be not justly liable to your censure; and you have passed over all the other parts of these books without notice. Had you been particular in your examination, you would have found cause to admire the probity and the intrepidity of the characters of the authors of them; you would have met with many instances of sublime composition; and, what is of more consequence, with many instances of prophetical veracity:—particularities of these kinds you have wholly overlooked. I cannot account for this; I have no right, no inclination, to call you a dishonest man; am I justified in considering you as a man not altogether destitute of ingenuity, but so entirely under the dominion of prejudice in every thing respecting the Bible, that, like a corrupted judge, previously determined to give sentence on one side, you are negligent in the examination of truth?

You proceed to the rest of the prophets, and you take them collectively; carefully, however, selecting for your observations such particularities as are best calculated to render, if possible, the prophets odious or ridiculous in the eyes of your readers. You confound prophets with poets and musicians: I would distinguish them thus; many prophets were poets and musicians, but all poets and musicians were not prophets. Prophecies were often delivered in poetic language and measure; but flights and

metaphors of the Jewish poets have not, as you affirm, been foolishly erected into what are now called prophecies,—they are now called, and have always been called, prophecies,—because they were real predictions, some of which have received, some are now receiving, and all will receive, their full accomplishment.

That there were false prophets, witches, necromancers, conjurers, and fortune-tellers, among the Jews, no person will attempt to deny; no nation, barbarous or civilized, has been without them: but when you would degrade the prophets of the Old Testament to a level with these conjuring, dreaming, strolling gentry—when you would represent them as spending their lives in fortune-telling, casting nativities, predicting riches, fortunate or unfortunate marriages, conjuring for lost goods, &c., I must be allowed to say, that you wholly mistake their office, and misrepresent their character; their office was to convey to the children of Israel the commands, the promises, the threatenings of Almighty God; and their character was that of men sustaining with fortitude, persecution in the discharge of their duty. There were false prophets in abundance amongst the Jews, and if you oppose these to the true prophets, and call them both party prophets, you have the liberty of doing so, but you will not thereby confound the distinction between truth and falsehood. False prophets are spoken of with detestation in many parts of scripture, particularly by Jeremiah, who accuses them of prophesying lies in the name of the Lord, saying, I have dreamed, "I have dreamed: Behold, I am against

the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith; that prophecy false dreams, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their lightness." Jeremiah cautions his countrymen against giving credit to their prophets, to their diviners, to their dreamers, to their enchanters, to their sorcerers, "which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon." You cannot think more contemptibly of these gentry, than they were thought of by the true prophets at the time they lived; but, as Jeremiah says on this subject, "what is the chaff to the wheat?" what are the false prophets to the true ones? Every thing good is liable to abuse; but who argues against the use of a thing from the abuse of it? against physicians, because there are pretenders to physic? Was Isaiah a fortune-teller, predicting riches, when he said to king Hezekiah, "Behold the days come, that all that is in thine house and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Fortune-tellers generally predict good luck to their simple customers, that they may make something by their trade; but Isaiah predicts to a monarch desolation of his country, and ruin of his family. This prophecy was spoken in the year before Christ 713; and above an hundred years afterwards, it was accomplished; when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, and carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the

Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, (2 Kings xxiv. 13.) and when he commanded the master of his eunuchs, (Dan. i. 3.) that he should take certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes, and educate them for three years, till they were able to stand before the king.

Jehoram, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and the king of Edom, going with their armies to make war on the king of Moab, came into a place where there was no water either for their men or cattle. In this distress they waited upon Elisha, (an high honour for one of your conjurers,) by the advice of Jehoshaphat, who knew that the word of the Lord was with him. The prophet, on seeing Jehoram, an idolatrous prince, who had revolted from the worship of the true God, come to consult him, said to him, "Get thee to the prophets of thy father and the prophets of thy mother." This you think shows Elisha to have been a party prophet, full of of venom and vulgarity—it shows him to have been a man of great courage, who respected the dignity of his own character, the sacredness of his offices as a prophet of God, whose duty it was to reprove the wickedness of kings, as of other men. He ordered them to make the valley where they were full of ditches;—this, you say, "every countryman could have told, that the way to get water was to dig for it:"—but this is not a true representation of the case; the ditches were not dug that the water might be gotten by digging for it, but that they might hold the water when it should miraculously come "without wind or rain," from another country; and it did come "from the

way of Edom, and the country was filled with water." As to Elisha's cursing the little children who had mocked at him, and their destruction in consequence of his imprecation, the whole story must be taken together. The provocation he received is, by some, considered as an insult offered to him, not as a man, but a prophet, and that the persons who offered it were not what we understand by little children, but grown up youths; the term child being applied, in the Hebrew language, to grown up persons. Be this as it may, the cursing was the act of the prophet; had it been a sin, it would not have been followed by a miraculous destruction of the offenders; for this was the act of God, who best knows who deserve punishment. What effect such a signal judgment had on the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, is no where said; but it is probable it was not without a good effect.

Ezekiel and Daniel lived during the Babylonian captivity; you allow their writings to be genuine. In this you differ from some of the greatest adversaries of Christianity; and in my opinion cut up, by this concession, the very root of your whole performance. It is next to an impossibility for any man, who admits the book of Daniel to be a genuine book, and who examines that book with intelligence and impartiality, to refuse his assent to the truth of Christianity. As to your saying, that the interpretations which commentators and priests have made of these books, only show the fraud, or the extreme folly to which credulity and priestcraft can go, I consider it as nothing but a proof of the extreme folly or fraud to which prejudice and infidel-

ity can carry a minute philosopher. You profess a fondness for science; I will refer you to a scientific man, who was neither a commentator nor a priest, —to Ferguson. In a tract entitled—The Year of our Saviour's Crucifixion ascertained; and the darkness, at the time of his crucifixion, proved to be supernatural—this real philosopher interprets the remarkable prophecy in the 9th chapter of Daniel, and concludes his dissertation in the following words:—"Thus we have an astronomical demonstration of the truth of this ancient prophecy, seeing that the prophetic year of the Messiah's being cut off, was the very same with the astronomical." I have somewhere read an account of a solemn disputation which was held at Venice, in the last century, between a Jew and a Christian: the Christian strongly argued from Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks, that Jesus was the Messiah, whom the Jews had long expected, from the predictions of their prophets:—the learned Rabbi, who presided at this disputation, was so forcibly struck by the argument, that he put an end to the business, saying,—"Let us shut up our Bibles; for if we proceed in the examination of this prophecy, it will make us all become Christians."—Was it a similar apprehension which deterred you from so much as opening the book of Daniel? You have not produced from it one exceptionable passage. I hope you will read that book with attention, with intelligence, and with an unbiassed mind follow the advice of our Saviour when he quoted this very prophecy—"Let him that readeth understand"—and I shall not despair of your conversion from deism to Christianity.

In order to discredit the authority of the books which you allow to be genuine, you form a strange and prodigious hypothesis concerning Ezekiel and Daniel, for which there is no manner of foundation either in history or probability. You suppose these two men to have had no dreams, no visions, no revelation from God Almighty; but to have pretended to these things; and under that disguise, to have carried on an enigmatical correspondence relative to the recovery of their country from the Babylonian yoke. That any man in his senses should frame or adopt such an hypothesis, should have so little regard to his own reputation as an impartial inquirer after truth, so little respect for the understanding of his readers, as to obtrude it on the world, would have appeared an incredible circumstance, had not you made it a fact.

You quote a passage from Ezekiel; in the 29th chapter, ver. 11, speaking of Egypt, it is said—"No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years."—This, you say, "never came to pass, and consequently it is false, as all the books I have already viewed are." Now that this did come to pass, we have, as Bishop Newton observes, "the testimonies of Megasthenes and Berosus, two heathen historians, who lived about 300 years before Christ: one of whom affirms, expressly, that Nebuchadnezzar conquered the greatest part of Africa; and the other affirms it, in effect, in saying, that when Nebuchadnezzar heard of the death of his father, having settled his affairs *in Egypt*, and committed the *captives* whom he took in Egypt

to the care of some of his friends to bring them after him, he hasted directly to Babylon." And if we had been possessed of no testimony in support of the prophecy, it would have been an hasty conclusion, that the prophecy never came to pass; the history of Egypt, at so remote a period, being no where accurately and circumstantially related. I admit that no period can be pointed out from the age of Ezekiel to the present, in which there was no foot of man or beast to be seen for forty years in all Egypt; but some think that only a part of Egypt is here spoken of; and surely you do not expect a literal accomplishment of an hyperbolical expression, denoting great desolation; importing that the trade of Egypt, which was carried on then, as at present, by caravans, by the foot of man and beast, should be annihilated. Had you taken the trouble to have looked a little farther into the book from which you have made your quotation, you would have there seen a prophecy delivered above two thousand years ago, and which has been fulfilling from that time to this—"Egypt shall be the basest of the kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations—there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt." This you may call a dream, a vision, a lie: I esteem it a wonderful prophecy; for "as is the prophecy, so has been the event. Egypt was conquered by the Babylonians; and after the Babylonians by the Persians; and after the Persians it became subject to the Macedonians; and after the Macedonians to the Romans; and after the Romans to the Saracens; and then to the Mamalucs; and is now a province of the Turkish empire."

Suffer me to produce to you from this author, not an enigmatical letter to Daniel respecting the recovery of Jerusalem from the hands of the king of Babylon, but an enigmatical prophecy concerning Zedekiah the king of Jerusalem, before it was taken by the Chaldeans.—"I will bring him (Zedekiah) to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not *see* it, though he shall die there."—How! not see Babylon, when he should die there! How, moreover, is this consistent, you may ask, with what Jeremiah had foretold—that Zedekiah should see the eyes of the king of Babylon?—This darkness of expression, and apparent contradiction between the two prophets, induced Zedekiah (as Josephus informs us) to give no credit to either of them; yet he unhappily experienced, and the fact is worthy your observation, the truth of them both. He saw the eyes of the king of Babylon, not at Babylon, but at Riblah; his eyes were there put out; and he was carried to Babylon, yet he saw it not; and thus were the predictions of both the prophets verified, and the enigma of Ezekiel explained.

As to your wonderful discovery, that the prophecy of Jonah is a book of some gentile, "and that it has been written as a fable, to expose the nonsense, and to satirize the vicious and malignant character of a Bible prophet, or a predicting priest," I shall put it, covered with *hellebore* for the service of its author, on the same shelf with your hypothesis concerning the conspiracy of Daniel and Ezekiel, and shall not say another word about it.

You conclude your objections to the Old Testa-

ment in a triumphant style; an angry opponent would say, in a style of extreme arrogance, and sottish self-sufficiency.—"I have gone," you say, "through the Bible (mistaking here, as in other places, the Old Testament for the Bible) as a man would go through a wood, with an axe on his shoulders, and fell trees: here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never grow." And is it possible that you should think so highly of your performance as to believe, that you have thereby demolished the authority of a book which Newton himself esteemed the most authentic of all histories; which, by its celestial light, illumines the darkest ages of antiquity; which is the touchstone whereby we are enabled to distinguish between true and fabulous theology, between the God of Israel, holy, just, and good, and the impure rabble of heathen Baalim; which has been thought, by competent judges, to have afforded matter for the laws of Solon, and a foundation for the philosophy of Plato; which has been illustrated by the labour of learning, in all ages and countries; and been admired and venerated for its piety, its sublimity, its veracity, by all who were able to read and understand it? No, sir; you have gone indeed, through the wood, with the best intention in the world to cut it down; but you have merely busied yourself in exposing to vulgar contempt a few unsightly shrubs, which good men had wisely concealed from public view; you have entangled yourself in thickets of thorns and briars; you have lost your way on the mountains of Lebanon: the goodly cedar trees

whereof, lamenting the madness, and pitying the blindness of your rage against them, have scorned the blunt edge and the base temper of your axe, and laughed unhurt at the feebleness of your stroke.

In plain language, you have gone through the Old Testament hunting after difficulties, and you have found some real ones; these you have endeavoured to magnify into insurmountable objections to the authority of the whole book. When it is considered that the Old Testament is composed of several books, written by different authors, and at different periods, from Moses to Malachi, comprising an abstracted history of a particular nation for above a thousand years, I think the real difficulties which occur in it are much fewer, and of much less importance, than could reasonably have been expected. Apparent difficulties you have represented as real ones, without hinting at the manner in which they have been explained. You have ridiculed things held most sacred, and calumniated characters esteemed most venerable; you have excited the scoffs of the profane; increased the scepticisms of the doubtful; shaken the faith of the unlearned; suggested cavils to the "disputers of this world;" and perplexed the minds of honest men who wish to worship the God of their fathers in sincerity and truth. This and more you have done in going through the Old Testament; but you have not so much as glanced at the great design of the whole, at the harmony and mutual dependence of the several parts. You have said nothing of the wisdom of God in selecting a particular people from the rest of mankind, not for their own sakes, but

that they might witness to the whole world, in successive ages, his existence and attributes; that they might be an instrument of subverting idolatry; of declaring the name of the God of Israel throughout the whole earth. It was through this nation that the Egyptians saw the wonders of God; that the Canaanites (whom wickedness had made a reproach to human nature) felt his judgments; that the Babylonians issued their decrees—"That none should dare to speak amiss of the God of Israel—that all should fear and tremble before him;" and it is through them that you and I, and all the world, are not at this day worshippers of idols. You have said nothing of the goodness of God in promising, that through the seed of Abraham, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed; that the desire of all nations, the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles, should come. You have passed by all the prophecies respecting the coming of the Messiah; though they absolutely fixed the time of his coming, and of his being cut off; described his office, character, condition, sufferings, and death, in so circumstantial a manner, that we cannot but be astonished at the accuracy of their completion in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. You have neglected noticing the testimony of the whole Jewish nation to the truth both of the natural and miraculous facts recorded in the Old Testament. That we may better judge of the weight of this testimony, let us suppose that God should now manifest himself to us, as we contend he did to the Israelites in Egypt, in the desert, and in the land of Canaan; and that he should continue these manifestations of himself

to our posterity for a thousand years or more, punishing or rewarding them according as they disobeyed or obeyed his commands; what would you expect should be the issue? You would expect that our posterity would, in the remotest period of time, adhere to their God, and maintain against all opponents the truth of the books in which the dispensations of God to us and to our successors had been recorded. They would not yield to the objections of men, who, not having experienced the same divine government, should, for want of such experience, refuse assent to their testimony. No; they would be to the then surrounding nations, what the Jews are to us, witnesses of the existence and of the moral government of God.

LETTER VII.

"THE New Testament, they tell us, is founded upon the prophecies of the Old: if so, it must follow the fate of its foundation." Thus you open your attack upon the New Testament; and I agree with you, that the New Testament must follow the fate of the Old; and that fate is to remain unimpaired by such efforts as you have made against it. The New Testament, however, is not founded solely on the prophecies of the Old. If an heathen from *Athens* or *Rome*, who had never heard of the prophecies of the Old Testament, had been an eye-witness of the miracles of Jesus, he would have made the same conclusion that the Jew Nicodemus did—"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Our Saviour tells the Jews—"Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me:" and he bids them search the scriptures, for they testified of him: but, notwithstanding this appeal to the prophecies of the Old Testament, Jesus said to the Jews, "Though ye believe not in me, believe the works,"—"believe me for the very works' sake."—"If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not

had sin." These are sufficient proofs that the truth of Christ's mission was not even to the Jews, much less to the Gentiles, founded solely on the truth of the prophecies of the Old Testament. So that if you could prove some of these prophecies to have been misapplied, and not completed in the person of Jesus, the truth of the Christian religion would not thereby be overturned. That Jesus of Nazareth was the person, in whom all the prophecies, direct and typical, in the Old Testament, respecting the Messiah, were fulfilled, is a proposition founded on those prophecies, and to be proved by comparing them with the history of his life. That Jesus was *a* prophet sent from God, is one proposition—that Jesus was *the* prophet, the Messiah, is another; and though he certainly was both *a* prophet and *the* prophet, yet the foundations of the proof of these propositions are separate and distinct.

The mere existence "of such a woman as Mary, and of such a man as Joseph, and Jesus," is, you say, a matter of indifference, about which there is no ground either to believe or to disbelieve. Belief is different from knowledge, with which you here seem to confound it. We know that the whole is greater than its part—and we know that all the angles in the same segment of a circle are equal to each other—we have intuition and demonstration as grounds of this knowledge; but is there no ground for belief of past or future existence? Is there no ground for believing that the sun will exist to-morrow, and that your father existed before you? You condescend, however, to

think it probable, that there were such persons as Mary, Joseph, and Jesus; and without troubling yourself about their existence or non-existence, assuming, as it were, for the sake of argument, but without positively granting, their existence, you proceed to inform us, "that it is the fable of Jesus Christ, as told in the New Testament, and the wild and visionary doctrine raised thereon," against which you contend. You will not repute it a fable, that there was such a man as Jesus Christ; that he lived in Judea near eighteen hundred years ago; that he went about doing good, and preaching, not only in the villages of Galilee, but in the city of Jerusalem; that he had several followers, who constantly attended him; that he was put to death by Pontius Pilate, that his disciples were numerous a few years after his death, not only in Judea, but in Rome, the capital of the world, and in every province of the Roman empire; that a particular day has been observed in a religious manner by all his followers, in commemoration of a real or supposed resurrection; and that the constant celebration of baptism, and of the Lord's supper, may be traced back from the present time to him, as the author of those institutions. These things constitute, I suppose, no part of your fable; and if these things be facts, they will, when maturely considered, draw after them so many other things related in the New Testament concerning Jesus, that there will be left for your fable but very scanty materials, which will require great fertility of invention, before you will dress them up into any form which will not disgust even a superficial observer.

The miraculous conception you esteem a fable, and in your mind it is an obscene fable. Impure, indeed, must that man's imagination be, who can discover any obscenity in the angel's declaration to Mary—The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore that Holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.—I wonder you do not find obscenity in Genesis, where it is said, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," and brought order out of confusion, a world out of a chaos, by his fostering influence. As to the Christian faith being built upon the heathen mythology, there is no ground whatever for the assertion; there would have been some for saying, that much of the heathen mythology was built upon the events recorded in the Old Testament.

You come now to a demonstration, or, which amounts to the same thing to a proposition, which cannot, you say, be controverted:—first, "that the *agreement* of all the parts of a story does not prove that story to be true, because the parts may agree and the whole may be false;—secondly, That the *disagreement* of the parts of a story proves that the *whole cannot be true.* The agreement does not prove truth, but the disagreement proves falsehood positively." Great use, I perceive, is to be made of this proposition. You will pardon my unskilfulness in dialectics, if I presume to controvert the truth of this abstract proposition, as applied to any purpose in life. The agreement of the parts of a story implies that the story has been told by at

least two persons (the life of Doctor Johnson, for instance, by Sir John Hawkins and Mr Boswell.) Now I think it scarcely possible for even two persons, and the difficulty is increased if there are more than two, to write the history of the life of any one of their acquaintance, without there being a considerable difference between them, with respect to the number and order of the incidents of his life. Some things will be omitted by one, and mentioned by the other; some things will be briefly touched by one, and the same things will be circumstantially detailed by the other; the same things which are mentioned in the same way by them both, may not be mentioned as having happened exactly at the same point of time, with other possible and probable differences. But these real or apparent difficulties, in minute circumstances, will not invalidate their testimony as to the material transactions of his life, much less will they render the whole of it a fable. If several independent witnesses, of fair character, should agree in all the parts of a story, (in testifying, for instance, that a murder or a robbery was committed at a particular time, in a particular place, and by a certain individual,) every court of justice in the world, would admit the fact, notwithstanding the abstract possibility, of the whole being false:—again, if several honest men should agree in saying, that they saw the king of France beheaded, though they should disagree as to the figure of the guillotine or the size of his executioner, as to the king's hands being bound or loose, as to his being composed or agitated in ascending the scaffold, yet every court of

justice in the world would think, that such difference, respecting the circumstances of the fact, did not invalidate the evidence respecting the fact itself. When you speak of the whole of a story, you cannot mean every particular circumstance connected with the story, but not essential to it; you must mean the pith and marrow of the story; for it would be impossible to establish the truth of any fact, (of admirals Byng or Keppel, for example, having neglected or not neglected their duty,) if a disagreement in the evidence of witnesses in minute points, should be considered as annihilating the weight of their evidence in points of importance. In a word, the relation of a fact differs essentially from the demonstration of a theorem. If one step is left out, one link in the chain of ideas constituting a demonstration is omitted, the conclusion will be destroyed; but a fact may be established, notwithstanding a disagreement of the witnesses in certain trifling particulars of their evidence respecting it.

You apply your incontrovertible proposition to the genealogies of Christ given by Matthew and Luke—there is a disagreement between them; therefore, you say, "If Matthew spake truth, Luke speaks falsehood; and if Luke spake truth, Matthew speaks falsehood; and thence there is no authority for believing either; and if they cannot be believed even in the very first thing they say and set out to prove, they are not entitled to be believed in any thing they say afterwards." I cannot admit either your premises or your conclusion—not your conclusion; because two authors, who differ in tracing back the pedigree of an individual for above a thou-

sand years, cannot, on that account, be esteemed incompetent to bear testimony to the transactions of his life, unless an intention to falsify could be proved against them. If two Welsh historians should, at this time, write the life of any remarkable man of their country, who had been dead twenty or thirty years, and should, through different branches of their genealogical tree, carry up the pedigree to *Cadwallon*, would they, on account of that difference, be discredited in every thing they said? Might it not be believed that they gave the pedigree as they had found it recorded in different instruments, but without the least intention to write a falsehood?—I cannot admit your premises; because Matthew speaks truth, and Luke speaks truth, though they do not speak the same truth; Matthew giving the genealogy of Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus, and Luke giving the genealogy of Mary, the real mother of Jesus. If you will not admit this, other explanations of the difficulty might be given; but I hold it sufficient to say, that the authors had no design to deceive the reader, that they took their accounts from the public registers, which were carefully kept, and that had they been fabricators of these genealogies, they would have been exposed at the time to instant detection: and the certainty of that detection would have prevented them from making the attempt to impose a false genealogy on the Jewish nation.

But that you may effectually overthrow the credit of these genealogies, you make the following calculation:—"From the birth of David to the birth of Christ is upwards of 1080 years: and as there

were but 27 full generations, to find the average age of each person mentioned in St Matthew's list at the time his first son was born, it is only necessary to divide 1080 by 27, which gives 40 years for each person. As the life-time of man was then but of the same extent it is now, it is an absurdity to suppose, that 27 generations should all be old bachelors, before they married. So far from this genealogy being a solemn truth, it is not even a reasonable lie."—This argument assumes the appearance of arithmetical accuracy, and the conclusion is in a style which even its truth would not excuse :—yet the argument is good for nothing, and the conclusion is not true. You have read the Bible with some attention ; and you are extremely liberal in imputing to it lies and absurdities ; read it over again, especially the books of the Chronicles, and you will there find, that in the genealogical list of St Matthew, three generations are omitted between Joram and Ozias ; Joram was the father of Azariah, Azariah of Joash, Joash of Amaziah, and Amaziah of Ozias. I inquire not, in this place, whence this omission proceeded ; whether it is to be attributed to an error in the genealogical tables from whence Matthew took his account, or to a corruption of the text of the evangelist ; still it is an omission. Now if you will add these three generations to the 27 you mention, and divide 1080 by 30, you will find the average age when these Jews had each of them their first son born, was 36. They married sooner than they ought to have done, according to Aristotle, who fixes thirty-seven as the most proper age, when a man should

marry. Nor was it necessary that they should have been old bachelors, though each of them had not a son to succeed him till he was thirty-six; they might have been married at twenty, without having a son till they were forty. You assume, in your argument, that the first-born son succeeded the father in the list—this is not true. Solomon succeeded David: yet David had at least six sons, who were grown to manhood before Solomon was born; and Rehoboam had at least three sons before he had Abia (Abijah) who succeeded him. It is needless to cite more instances to this purpose; but from these, and other circumstances which might be insisted upon, I can see no ground for believing, that the genealogy of Jesus Christ mentioned by St Matthew, is not a solemn truth.

You insist much upon some things being mentioned by one evangelist, which are not mentioned by all or any of the others; and you take this to be a reason why we should consider the gospels, not as the words of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but as the productions of some *unconnected* individuals, each of whom made his own legend. I do not admit the truth of this supposition; but I may be allowed to use it as an argument against yourself—it removes every possible suspicion of fraud and imposture, and confirms the gospel history in the strongest manner. Four *unconnected* individuals have each written memoirs of the life of Jesus; from whatever source they derived their materials, it is evident that they agree in a great many particulars of the last importance; such as the purity of his manners; the sanctity of his doc-

trines; the multitude and publicity of his miracles; the persecuting spirit of his enemies; the manner of his death; and the certainty of his resurrection; and whilst they agree in these great points, their disagreement in points of little consequence, is rather a confirmation of the truth, than an indication of the falsehood, of their several accounts.—Had they agreed in nothing, their testimony ought to have been rejected as a legendary tale; had they agreed in every thing, it might have been suspected, that instead of unconnected individuals, they were a set of impostors. The manner in which the evangelists have recorded the particulars of the life of Jesus, is wholly conformable to what we experience in other biographers, and claims our highest assent to its truth, notwithstanding the force of your incontrovertible proposition.

As an instance of contradiction between the evangelists, you tell us, that Matthew says, the angel announcing the immaculate conception appeared unto Joseph; but Luke says he appeared unto Mary. The angel, sir, appeared to them both; to Mary, when he informed her that she should, by the power of God, conceive a son; to Joseph, some months afterwards, when Mary's pregnancy was visible; in the interim she had paid a visit of three months to her cousin Elizabeth. It might have been expected, that, from the accuracy with which you have read your Bible, you could not have confounded these obviously distinct appearances; but men, even of candour, are liable to mistakes. Who, you ask, would now believe a girl, who should say she was gotten with child by a ghost?

—Who but yourself, would ever have asked a question so abominably indecent and profane? I cannot argue with you on this subject.—You will never persuade the world, that the Holy Spirit of God has any resemblance to the stage ghosts in Hamlet or Macbeth, from which you seem to have derived your idea of it.

The story of the massacre of the young children by the order of Herod, is mentioned only by Matthew; and therefore you think it is a lie. We must give up all history if we refuse to admit facts recorded by only one historian. Matthew addressed his gospel to the Jews, and put them in mind of a circumstance of which they must have had a melancholy remembrance; but gentile converts were less interested in that event. The evangelists were not writing the life of Herod, but of Jesus; it is no wonder that they omitted, above half a century after the death of Herod, an instance of his cruelty, which was not essentially connected with their subject. The massacre, however, was probably known even at Rome; and it was certainly correspondent to the character of Herod. John, you say, at the time of the massacre, "was under two years of age, and yet he escaped; so that the story circumstantially belies itself."—John was six months older than Jesus; and you cannot prove that he was not beyond the age to which the order of Herod extended; it probably reached no farther than to those who had completed their first year, without including those who had entered upon their second: but without insisting upon this, still I contend, that you cannot prove John to have been under two

years of age at the time of the massacre; and I could give many probable reasons to the contrary. Nor is it certain that John was, at that time, in that part of the country to which the edict of Herod extended. But there would be no end of answering, at length, all your little objections.

No two of the evangelists, you observe, agree in reciting *exactly in the same words*, the written inscription which was put over Christ when he was crucified.—I admit that there is an unessential verbal difference; and are you certain that there was not a verbal difference in the inscriptions themselves?—One was written in Hebrew, another in Greek, another in Latin; and, though they had all the same meaning, yet it is probable, that if two men had translated the Hebrew and the Latin into Greek, there would have been a verbal difference between their translations. You have rendered yourself famous by writing a book called—The Rights of Man:—had you been guillotined by Robespierre, with this title, written in French, English, and German, and affixed to the guillotine—Thomas Paine, of America, author of The Rights of Man—and had four persons, some of whom had seen the execution, and the rest had heard of it from eye-witnesses, written short accounts of your life twenty years or more after your death, and one had said the inscription was—This is Thomas Paine, the author of The Rights of Man—another, The author of The Rights of man—a third, This is the author of The Rights of Man—and a fourth, Thomas Paine of America, the author of the Rights of Man—would any man of common sense have doubted,

on account of this disagreement, the veracity of the authors in writing your life?—"The only one," you tell us, "of the men called apostles, who appears to have been near the spot where Jesus was crucified, was Peter."—This your assertion is not true—we do not know that Peter was present at the crucifixion; but we do know that John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was present; for Jesus spoke to him from the cross.—You go on, "But why should we believe Peter, convicted by their own account of perjury, in swearing that he knew not Jesus?" I will tell you why—because Peter sincerely repented of the wickedness into which he had been betrayed, through fear for his life, and suffered martyrdom in attestation of the truth of the Christian religion.

But the evangelists disagree, you say, not only as to the superscription on the cross, but as to the time of the crucifixion, "Mark saying it was at the third hour (nine in the morning,) and John at the sixth hour (twelve, as you suppose,) at noon." Various solutions have been given of this difficulty, none of which satisfied Doctor Middleton, much less can it be expected that any of them should satisfy you; but there is a solution not noticed by him, in which many judicious men have acquiesced —That John, writing his gospel in Asia, used the Roman method of computing time; which was the same as our own; so that by the sixth hour, when Jesus was *condemned*, we are to understand six o'clock in the morning; the intermediate time from six to nine, when he was crucified, being employed in preparing for the crucifixion. But if this diffi-

culty should be still esteemed insuperable, it does not follow that it will always remain so; and if it should, the main point, the crucifixion of Jesus, will not be affected thereby.

I cannot, in this place, omit remarking some circumstances attending the crucifixion, which are so natural, that we might have wondered if they had not occurred. Of all the disciples of Jesus, John was beloved by him with a peculiar degree of affection; and as kindness produces kindness, there can be little doubt that the regard was reciprocal. Now whom should we expect to be the attendants of Jesus in his last sufferings?—Whom but John, the friend of his heart?—Whom but his mother, whose soul was now pierced through by the sword of sorrow, which *Simeon* had foretold?—Whom but those, who had been attached to him through life; who, having been healed by him of their infirmities, were impelled by gratitude to minister to him of their substance, to be attentive to all his wants? These were the persons whom we should have expected to attend his execution; and these were there. To whom would an expiring son of the best affections, recommend a poor, and, probably, a widowed mother, but to his warmest friend? —and this did Jesus.—Unmindful of the extremity of his own torture, and anxious to alleviate the burden of her sorrows, and to protect her old age from future want and misery, he said to his beloved disciple—"Behold thy mother! and from that hour that disciple took her to his own home." I own to you, that such instances as these, of the conformity of events to our probable expectation are to me

genuine marks of the simplicity and truth of the gospels; and far outweigh a thousand little objections, arising from our ignorance of manners, times, and circumstances, or from our incapacity to comprehend the means used by the Supreme Being in the moral government of his creatures.

St Matthew mentions several miracles which attended our Saviour's crucifixion—the darkness which overspread the land—the rending of the veil of the temple—an earthquake which rent the rocks—and the resurrection of many saints, and their going into the holy city. "Such," you say, "is the account which this dashing writer of the book of Matthew gives, but in which he is not supported by the writers of the other books." This is not accurately expressed; Matthew is supported by Mark and Luke, with respect to two of the miracles—the darkness—and the rending of the veil:—and their omission of the others does not prove, that they were either ignorant of them, or disbelieved them. I think it idle to pretend to say positively what influenced them to mention only two miracles; they probably thought them sufficient to convince any person, as they convinced the centurion, that Jesus "was a righteous man,—the Son of God." And these two miracles were better calculated to produce general conviction, amongst the persons for whose benefit Mark and Luke wrote their gospels, than either the earthquake or the resurrection of the saints. The earthquake was, probably, confined to a particular spot, and might, by an objector, have been called a natural phenomenon; and those to whom the saints appeared might at the

time of writing the gospels of Mark and Luke, have been dead: but the darkness must have been generally known and remembered; and the veil of the temple might still be preserved at the time these authors wrote. As to John not mentioning any of these miracles—it is well known that his gospel was written as a supplement to the other gospels; he has therefore omitted many things which the other three evangelists had related, and he has added several things which they had not mentioned; in particular, he has added a circumstance of great importance; he tells us that he saw one of the soldiers pierce the side of Jesus with a spear, and that blood and water flowed through the wound; and lest any one should doubt of the fact, from its not being mentioned by the other evangelists, he asserts it with peculiar earnestness—"And he that saw it, bear record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." —John saw blood and water flowing from the wound; the blood is easily accounted for, but whence came the water? The anatomists tell us, it came from the *pericardium:* so consistent is evangelical testimony with the most curious researches into natural science! You amuse yourself with the account of what the scripture calls *many* saints, and you call an *army* of saints, and are angry with Matthew for not having told you a great many things about them. It is very possible that Matthew might have known the fact of their resurrection, without knowing every thing about them; but if he had gratified your curiosity in every particular, I am of opinion that you would not have

believed a word of what he had told you. I have no curiosity on the subject: it is enough for me to know that "Christ was the first fruits of them that slept," and "that all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth," as those holy men did, who heard the voice of the son of God at his resurrection, and passed from death to life. If I durst indulge myself in being wise above what is written, I might be able to answer many of your inquiries relative to these saints; but I dare not touch the ark of the Lord, I dare not support the authority of the scripture by the boldness of conjecture. Whatever difficulty there may be in accounting for the silence of the other evangelists, and of St Paul also, on this subject, yet there is a greater difficulty in supposing that Matthew did not give a true narration of what had happened at the crucifixion. If there had been no supernatural darkness, no earthquake, no rending of the veil of the temple, no graves opened, no resurrection of holy men, no appearance of them unto many—if none of these things had been true, or rather if any one of them had been false, what motive could Matthew, writing to the Jews, have had for trumping up such wonderful stories? He wrote, as every man does, with an intention to be believed; and yet every Jew he met would have stared him in the face, and told him that he was a liar and an impostor. What author, who, twenty years hence, should address to the French nation an history of Louis XVI. would venture to affirm, that when he was beheaded there was darkness for three hours over all France? that there was an earthquake? that rocks were

split? graves opened? and dead men brought to life, who appeared to many persons in Paris?—It is quite impossible to suppose, that any one would dare to publish such obvious lies; and I think it equally impossible to suppose, that Matthew would have dared to publish his account of what happened at the death of Jesus, had not the account been generally known to be true.

LETTER VIII.

THE "tale of the resurrection," you say, "follows that of the crucifixion." You have accustomed me so much to this kind of language, that when I find you speaking of a tale, I have no doubt of meeting with a truth. From the apparent disagreement in the accounts, which the evangelists have given of some circumstances respecting the resurrection, you remark—"If the writers of these books had gone into a court of justice to prove an *alibi* (for it is the nature of an alibi that is here attempted to be proved, namely, the absence of a dead body by supernatural means,) and had given their evidence in the same contradictory manner, as it is here given; they would have been in danger of having their ears cropt for perjury, and would have justly deserved it"—"hard words, or hanging," it seems, if you had been their judge. Now I maintain, that it is the brevity with which the account of the resurrection is given by all the evangelists, which has occasioned the seeming confusion; and that this confusion would have been cleared up at once, if the witnesses of the resurrection had been examined before any judicature. As we cannot have this *vivâ voce* examination of all the witnesses, let us call up and question the evangelists as witnesses to a supernatural alibi.—Did

you find the sepulchre of Jesus empty? One of us actually saw it empty, and the rest heard from eye-witnesses, that it was empty.—Did you, or any of the followers of Jesus take away the dead body from the sepulchre? All answer, No.—Did the soldiers, or the Jews, take away the body? No.—How are you certain of that? Because we saw the body when it was dead, and saw it afterwards when it was alive.—How do you know that what you saw was the body of Jesus? We had been long and intimately acquainted with Jesus, and knew his person perfectly.—Were you not affrighted, and mistook a spirit for a body? No; the body had flesh and bones; we are sure that it was the very body which hung upon the cross, for we saw the wound in his side, and the print of the nails in the hands and feet.—And all this you are ready to swear? We are; and we are ready to die also, sooner than we will deny any part of it.—This is the testimony which all the evangelists would give, in whatever court of justice they were examined; and this, I apprehend, would sufficiently establish the alibi of the dead body from the sepulchre, by supernatural means.

But as the resurrection of Jesus is a point which you attack with all your force, I will examine minutely the principal of your objections; I do not think them deserving of this notice, but they shall have it. The book of Matthew, you say, "states that when Christ was put in the sepulchre, the Jews applied to Pilate for a watch or a guard to be placed over the sepulchre, to prevent the body being stolen by the disciples."—I admit this account,

but it is not the whole of the account; you have omitted the reason for the request which the chief priests made to Pilate—"Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again." It is material to remark this; for at the very time that Jesus predicted his resurrection, he predicted also his crucifixion, and all that he should suffer from the malice of those very men who now applied to Pilate for a guard.—"He showed to his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (Matt. xvi. 21.) These men knew full well that the first part of this prediction had been accurately fulfilled through their malignity; and, instead of repenting of what they had done, they were so infatuated as to suppose, that by a guard of soldiers they could prevent the completion of the second.—The other books, you observe, "say nothing about this application, nor about the sealing of the stone, nor the guard, nor the watch, and according to these accounts there were none." This, sir, I deny. The other books do not say that there were none of these things; how often must I repeat, that omissions are not contradictions, nor silence concerning a fact, a denial of it?

You go on—"The book of Matthew continues its account that at the end of the sabbath, as it began to *dawn*, towards the first day of the week, came *Mary Magdalene* and the other *Mary* to see the sepulchre. Mark says it was sun-rising, and John says it was dark. Luke says it was Mary

Magdalene, and Joanna, and *Mary the mother of James*, and *other women*, that came to the sepulchre. And John says that Mary Magdalene came alone. So well do they all agree about their first evidence! they all appear, however, to have known most about Mary Magdalene; she was a woman of a large acquaintance, and it was not an ill conjecture that she might be upon the stroll." This is a long paragraph; I will answer it distinctly:—first, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the time when the women went to the sepulchre; all the evangelists agree as to the day on which they went; and, as to the time of the day, it was early in the morning; what court of justice in the world would set aside this evidence, as insufficient to substantiate the fact of the women's having gone to the sepulchre, because the witnesses differed as to the degree of twilight which lighted them on their way? Secondly, there is no disagreement of evidence, with respect to the persons who went to the sepulchre; John states that Mary Magdalene went to the sepulchre; but he does not state, *as you make him state*, that Mary Magdalene went alone; she might, for any thing you have proved, or can prove to the contrary, have been accompanied by all the women mentioned by Luke:—is it an unusual thing to distinguish by name a principal person going on a visit, or on an embassy, without mentioning his subordinate attendants? Thirdly, in opposition to your insinuation that Mary Magdalene was a common woman, I wish it to be considered, whether there is any scriptural authority for that imputation; and whether there be or not I must contend that a

repentant and reformed woman ought not to be esteemed an improper witness of a fact. The conjecture which you adopt concerning her, is nothing less than an illiberal, indecent, unfounded calumny, not excusable in the mouth of a libertine, and intolerable in yours.

The book of Matthew, you observe, goes on to say—"and behold, there was an earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and *sat upon it*:—but the other books say nothing about an earthquake,"—what then? does their silence prove that there was none?—"nor about the angel rolling back the stone and sitting upon it;"—what then? does their silence prove that the stone was not rolled back by an angel, and that he did not sit upon it?—"and according to their accounts there was no angel sitting there." This conclusion I must deny; their accounts do not say there was no angel sitting there, at the time that Matthew says he sat upon the stone. They do not deny the fact, they simply omit the mention of it; and they all take notice that the women, when they arrived at the sepulchre, found the stone rolled away: hence it is evident, that the stone was rolled away *before* the women arrived at the sepulchre; and the other evangelists, giving an account of what happened to the women *when* they reached the sepulchre, have merely omitted giving an account of a transaction previous to their arrival. Where is the contradiction? What space of time intervened between the rolling away of the stone, and the arrival of the women at the sepulchre, is no where mentioned; bu

it certainly was long enough for the angel to have changed his position; from sitting on the outside he might have entered into the sepulchre; and another angel might have made his appearance, or, from the first, there might have been two, one on the outside rolling away the stone, and the other within. Luke, you tell us, "says there were two, and they were both standing; and John says there were two, and both sitting." It is impossible, I grant, even for an angel to be sitting and standing at the same instant of time; but Luke and John do not speak of the same instant, nor of the same appearance—Luke speaks of the appearance to all the women; and John of the appearance to Mary Magdalene alone, who tarried weeping at the sepulchre after Peter and John had left it. But I forbear making any more minute remarks on still minuter objections, all of which are grounded on this mistake—that the angels were seen at one particular time, in one particular place, and by the same individuals.

As to your inference, from Matthew's using the expression *unto this day*, "that the book must have been manufactured after a lapse of some generations at least," it cannot be admitted against the positive testimony of all antiquity. That the story about stealing away the body was a bungling story, I readily admit; but the chief priests are answerable for it; it is not worthy either your notice or mine, except as it is a strong instance to you, to me, and to every body, how far prejudice may mislead the understanding.

You come to that part of the evidence in those books that respects, you say, "the pretended ap-

pearances of Christ after his pretended resurrection; the writer of the book of Matthew relates, that the angel that was sitting on the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre, said to the two Marys, (chap. xxviii, 7.) "Behold, Christ is gone before you into Galilee, there shall you see him." The gospel, sir, was preached to poor and illiterate men; and it is the duty of priests to preach it to them in all its purity; to guard them against the errors of mistaken, or the designs of wicked men. You then, who can read your Bible, turn to this passage, and you will find that the angel did not say, "Behold, Christ *is gone* before you into Galilee," —but, "Behold, *he goeth* before you into Galilee." I know not what Bible you made use of in this quotation, none that I have seen render the original word by—he is gone—it might be properly rendered, he will go; and it is literally rendered, he is going. This phrase does not imply an immediate setting out for Galilee: when a man has fixed upon a long journey, to London or Bath, it is common enough to say, he is going to London or Bath, though the time of his going may be at some distance. Even your dashing Matthew could not be guilty of such a blunder as to make the angel say *he is gone;* for he tells us immediately afterwards, that, as the women were departing from the sepulchre to tell his disciples what the angels had said to them, Jesus himself met them. Now how Jesus could be *gone* into Galilee, and yet meet the women at Jerusalem, I leave you to explain, for the blunder is not chargeable upon Matthew. I excuse your introducing the expression—"then the eleven

disciples went away into Galilee," for the quotation is rightly made; but had you turned to the Greek Testament, you would not have found in this place any word answering to *then:* the passage is better translated—and the eleven. Christ had said to his disciples, (Matt. xxvi, 32.) "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee:" and the angel put the women in mind of the very expression and prediction—*he is risen, as he said: and behold he goeth before you into Galilee.* Matthew, intent upon the appearance in Galilee, of which there were, probably, at the time he wrote, many living witnesses in Judea, omits the mention of many appearances taken notice of by John, and by this omission, seems to connect the day of the resurrection of Jesus, with that of the departure of the disciples for Galilee. You seem to think this a great difficulty, and incapable of solution; for you say, "It is not possible, unless we admit these disciples the right of wilful lying, that the writers of these books could be any of the eleven persons called disciples; for if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jesus in a mountain, by his own appointment, on the same day that he is said to have risen, Luke and John must have been two of that eleven; yet the writer of Luke says expressly, and John implies as much, that the meeting was that same day in a house at Jerusalem; and on the other hand, if, according to Luke and John the *eleven* were assembled in a house at Jerusalem, Matthew must have been one of that eleven; yet Matthew says, the meeting was in a mountain in Galilee, and consequently the evidence

given in those books destroys each other." When I was a young man in the university, I was pretty much accustomed to drawing of consequences; but my *Alma Mater* did not suffer me to draw consequences after your manner; she taught me, that a false position must end in an absurd conclusion. I have shown your position—that the eleven went into Galilee on the day of the resurrection—to be false, and hence your consequence—that the evidence given in these two books destroys each other—is not to be admitted. You ought, moreover, to have considered, that the feast of unleavened bread, which immediately followed the day on which the passover was eaten, lasted seven days; and that strict observers of the law did not think themselves at liberty to leave Jerusalem, till that feast was ended; and this is a collateral proof that the disciples did not go to Galilee on the day of the resurrection.

You certainly have read the New Testament, but not, I think, with great attention, or you would have known who the apostles were. In this place you reckon *Luke* as one of the eleven, and in other places you speak of him as an eye-witness of the things he relates; you ought to have known that Luke was no apostle; and he tells you himself, in the preface to his gospel, that he wrote from the testimony of others. If this mistake proceeds from your ignorance, you are not a fit person to write comments on the Bible; if from design, (which I am unwilling to suspect,) you are still less fit; in either case it may suggest to your readers the propriety of suspecting the truth and accuracy of your assertions, however daring and intemperate.—"Of

the numerous priests or parsons of the present day, bishops and all, the sum total of whose learning," according to you, " is *a b ab*, and *hic*, *hæc*, *hoc*, there is not one amongst them," you say, " who can write poetry like Homer, or science like Euclid."—If I should admit this, (though there are many of them, I doubt not, who understand these authors better than you do,) yet I cannot admit that there is one amongst them, bishops and all, so ignorant as to rank Luke the evangelist among the apostles of Christ. I will not press this point; any man may fall into a mistake, and the consciousness of this fallibility should create in all men a little modesty, a little diffidence, a little caution, before they do presume to call the most illustrious characters of antiquity, liars, fools, and knaves.

You want to know why Jesus did not show himself to all the people after his resurrection. This is one of Spinoza's objections; and it may sound well enough in the mouth of a Jew, wishing to excuse the infidelity of his countrymen; but it is not judiciously adopted by deists of other nations. God gives us the means of health, but he does not force us to the use of them; he gives us the powers of the mind, but he does not compel us to the cultivation of them: he gave the Jews opportunities of seeing the miracles of Jesus, but he did not oblige them to believe them. They who persevered in their incredulity after the resurrection of Lazarus, would have persevered also after the resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus had been buried four days, Jesus but three; the body of Lazarus had begun to undergo corruption, the body of Jesus saw no corrup-

tion ; why should you expect, that they would have believed in Jesus on his own resurrection, when they had not believed in him on the resurrection of Lazarus? When the Pharisees were told of the resurrection of Lazarus, they, together with the chief priests, gathered a council and said, "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him :— then from that day forth they took counsel together to put him to death." The great men at Jerusalem, you see, admitted that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead; yet the belief of that miracle did not generate conviction that Jesus was the Christ, it only exasperated their malice, and accelerated their purpose of destroying him. Had Jesus shown himself after his resurrection, the chief priests would probably have gathered another council, have opened it with, What do we? and ended it with a determination to put him to death. As to us, the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, which we have in the New Testament, is far more convincing, than if it had been related that he showed himself to every man in Jerusalem ; for then we should have had a suspicion, that the whole story had been fabricated by the Jews.

You think Paul an improper witness of the resurrection; I think him one of the fittest that could have been chosen: and for this reason—his testimony is the testimony of a former enemy. He had, in his own miraculous conversion, sufficient ground for changing his opinion as to a matter of fact; for believing that to have been a fact, which he had formerly, through extreme prejudice, con-

sidered as a fable. For the truth of the resurrection of Jesus he appeals to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses; and before whom does he make this appeal?—Before his enemies, who were able and willing to blast his character, if he had advanced an untruth. You know, undoubtedly, that Paul had resided at Corinth near two years; that, during a part of that time, he had testified to the Jews, that Jesus was the Christ; that, finding the bulk of that nation obstinate in their unbelief, he had turned to the Gentiles, and had converted many to the faith in Christ: that he left Corinth, and went to preach the gospel in other parts; that about three years after he had quitted Corinth, he wrote a letter to the converts which he had made in that place, and who after his departure had been split into different factions, and had adopted different teachers in opposition to Paul. From this account we may be certain, that Paul's letter, and every circumstance in it, would be minutely examined. The city of Corinth was full of Jews; these men were, in general, Paul's bitter enemies; yet in the face of them all, he asserts, "that Jesus Christ was buried; that he rose again the third day; that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; that he was afterwards seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part were then alive." An appeal to above 250 living witnesses, is a pretty strong proof of a fact; but it becomes irresistible, when that appeal is submitted to the judgment of enemies. St Paul, you must allow, was a man of ability; but he would have been an idiot, had he put it in the power of his enemies

to prove, from his own letter, that he was a lying rascal. They neither proved, nor attempted to prove, any such thing; and, therefore, we may safely conclude, that this testimony of Paul, to the resurrection of Jesus, was true: and it is a testimony, in my opinion, of the greatest weight.

You come, you say, to the last scene, the ascension; upon which, in your opinion, "the reality of the future mission of the disciples was to rest for proof."—I do not agree with you in this. The reality of the future mission of the apostles might have been proved, though Jesus Christ had not visibly ascended into heaven. Miracles are the proper proofs of a divine mission: and when Jesus gave the apostles a commission to preach the gospel, he commanded them to stay at Jerusalem, till they "were endued with power from on high." Matthew has omitted the mention of the ascension; and John, you say, has not said a syllable about it. I think otherwise, John has not given an express account of the ascension, but has certainly said something about it: for he informs us, that Jesus said to Mary, "Touch me not; for I am not yet *ascended* to my father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I *ascend* unto my father and your father, and to my God and your God." This is surely saying something about the ascension: and if the fact of the ascension be not related by John or Matthew, it may reasonably be supposed, that the omission was made on account of the notoriety of the fact. That the fact was generally known, may be justly collected from the reference which Peter makes to it in the hearing of all the Jews, a very few days

after it had happened.—"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being *by the right hand of God* exalted"—Paul bears testimony also to the ascension, when he says, that Jesus was *received up into glory*. As to the difference you contend for, between the accounts of the ascension, as given by Mark and Luke, it does not exist; except in this, that Mark omits the particulars of Jesus going with his apostles to Bethany, and blessing them there, which are mentioned by Luke. But omissions, I must often put you in mind, are not contradictions.

You have now, you say, "gone through the examination of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and when it is considered that the whole space of time, from the crucifixion to what is called the ascension, is but a few days, apparently not more than three or four, and that all the circumstances are reported to have happened near the same spot, Jerusalem, it is, I believe, impossible to find, in any story upon record, so many, and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in those books."—What am I to say to this? Am I to say that, in writing this paragraph, you have forfeited your character as an honest man? Or, admitting your honesty, am I to say that you are grossly ignorant of the subject? Let the reader judge.—John says, that Jesus appeared to his disciples at Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection, and that Thomas was not then with them. The same John says, that after *eight days* he appeared to them again, when Thomas was with them. Now, sir, how *apparently three or four days* can

be consistent with *really eight days*, I leave you to make out. But this is not the whole of John's testimony, either with respect to *place* or *time*—for he says—After these things (after the two appearances to the disciples at Jerusalem on the first and on the eighth day after the resurrection) Jesus showed himself again to his disciples at the sea of *Tiberias*. The sea of Tiberias, I presume you know, was in Galilee : and Galilee, you may know, was sixty or seventy miles from Jerusalem ; it must have taken the disciples some time, after the eighth day to travel from Jerusalem into Galilee. What, in your own insulting language to the priests, what have you to answer as to the *same spot*, *Jerusalem*, as to your apparently *three or four days* ?—But this is not all. Luke, in the beginning of the Acts, refers to his gospel, and says—" Christ showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of the apostles forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God :"—instead of *four* you perceive there were *forty* days between the crucifixion and the ascension. I need not, I trust, after this, trouble myself about the falsehoods and contradictions which you impute to the evangelists ; your readers cannot but be upon their guard, as to the credit due to your assertions, however bold and improper. You will suffer me to remark, that the evangelists were plain men, who, convinced of the truth of their narration, and conscious of their own integrity, have related what they knew, with admirable simplicity. They seem to have said to the Jews of their time, and to say to the Jews and unbelievers of all times—We have

told you the truth : and if you will not believe us, we have nothing more to say.—Had they been impostors, they would have written with more caution and art, have obviated every cavil, and avoided every appearance of contradiction. This they have not done ; and this I consider as a proof of their honesty and veracity.

John the baptist had given his testimony to the truth of our Saviour's mission in the most unequivocal terms : he afterwards sent two of his disciples to Jesus, to ask him whether he was really the expected Messiah or not. Matthew relates *both* these circumstances ; had the writer of the book of Matthew been an impostor, would he have invalidated John's testimony, by bringing forward his real or apparent doubt? Impossible ! Matthew, having proved the resurrection of Jesus, tells us, that the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them, and "when they saw him, they worshipped him ; but some doubted."—Would an impostor, in the very last place where he mentions the resurrection, and in the conclusion of his book, have suggested such a cavil to unbelievers, as to say—some doubted ? Impossible ! The evangelist has left us to collect the reason why some doubted :—the disciples saw Jesus, at a distance, on the mountain ; and some of them fell down and worshipped him ; whilst others doubted whether the person they saw was really Jesus ; their doubt, however, could not have lasted long, for in the very next verse we are told, that Jesus came and spake unto them.

Great and laudable pains have been taken by

many learned men, to harmonize the several accounts given us by the evangelists of the resurrection. It does not seem to me to be a matter of any great consequence to Christianity, whether the accounts can, in every minute particular, be harmonized or not; since there is no such discordance in them, as to render the fact of the resurrection doubtful to any impartial mind. If any man in a court of justice, should give positive evidence of a fact, and three others should afterwards be examined, and all of them should confirm the evidence of the first, as to the fact, but should apparently differ from him and from each other, by being more or less particular in their accounts of the circumstances attending the fact; ought we to doubt of the fact, because we could not harmonize the evidence respecting the circumstances relating to it? The omission of any one circumstance (such as that of Mary Magdalene having gone twice to the sepulchre; or that of the angel having, after he had rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, entered into the sepulchre) may render an harmony impossible, without having recourse to supposition to supply the defect. You deists laugh at all such attempts, and call them priestcraft. I think it better then, in arguing with you, to admit that there may be (not granting, however, that there is) an irreconcilable difference between the evangelists in some of their accounts respecting the life of Jesus, or his resurrection. Be it so, what then? Does this difference, admitting it to be real, destroy the credibility of the gospel history in any of its essential points? Certainly, in my opinion not. As I look

upon this to be a general answer to most of your deistical objections, I profess my sincerity, in saying, that I consider it as a true and sufficient answer; and I leave it to your consideration. I have purposely, in the whole of this discussion, been silent as to the inspiration of the evangelists; well knowing that you would have rejected, with scorn, any thing I could have said on that point: but, in disputing with a deist, I do most solemnly contend, that the Christian religion is true, and worthy of all acceptation, whether the evangelists were inspired or not.

Unbelievers, in general, wish to conceal their sentiments; they have a decent respect for public opinion; are cautious of affronting the religion of their country; fearful of undermining the foundations of civil society. Some few have been more daring, but less judicious, and have, without disguise professed their unbelief. But you are the first who ever swore that he was an infidel, concluding your deistical creed with—So help me God! I pray that God may help you; that he may, through the influence of his Holy Spirit, bring you to a right mind; convert you to the religion of his Son, whom, out of his abundant love to mankind, he sent into the world, that all who believed in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

You swear, that you think the christian religion is not true. I give full credit to your oath; it is an oath in confirmation—of what?—of an opinion. It proves the sincerity of your declaration of your opinion; but the opinion, notwithstanding the oath, may be either true or false. Permit me to pro-

duce to you an oath not confirming an opinion, but a fact; it is the oath of St Paul, when he swears to the Galatians, that in what he told them of his miraculous conversion, he did not tell a lie: "Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not:"—do but give that credit to Paul which I give to you: do but consider the difference between an opinion and a fact, and I shall not despair of your becoming a Christian.

Deism, you say, consists in a belief of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what is called virtue; and in this (as far as religion is concerned) you rest all your hopes. There is nothing in deism but what is in christianity; but there is much in christianity which is not in deism. The Christian has no doubt concerning a future state; every deist, from Plato to Thomas Paine, is on this subject overwhelmed with doubts insuperable by human reason. The Christian has no misgivings as to the pardon of penitent sinners, through the intercession of a mediator; the deist is harrassed with apprehension, lest the moral justice of God should demand, with inexorable rigour, punishment for transgression. The Christian has no doubt concerning the lawfulness and the efficacy of prayer; the deist is disturbed on this point by abstract considerations concerning the goodness of God, which wants not to be intreated; concerning his foresight, which has no need of our information; concerning his immutability, which cannot be changed through our supplication. The Christian admits the providence of God and the liberty of human actions; the deist is involved in great diffi-

culties, when he undertakes the proof of either. The Christian has assurance that the Spirit of God will help his infirmities; the deist does not deny the possibility that God may have access to the human mind, but he has no ground to believe the fact of his either enlightening the understanding, influencing the will, or purifying the heart.

LETTER IX.

"THOSE," you say, "who are not much acquainted with ecclesiastical history, may suppose that the book called the New Testament has existed ever since the time of Jesus Christ, but the fact is historically otherwise; there was no such book as the New Testament, till more than three hundred years after the time that Christ is said to have lived."—This paragraph is calculated to mislead common readers; it is necessary to unfold its meaning. The book called the New Testament, consists of twenty-seven different parts: concerning seven of these, viz. the epistle to the Hebrews, that of James, the second of Peter, the second of John, the third of John, that of Jude, and the Revelation, there were at first some doubts; and the question, whether they should be received into the canon, might be decided, as all questions concerning opinions must be, by vote. With respect to the other twenty parts, those who are most acquainted with ecclesiastical history will tell you, as Du Pin does after Eusebius, that they were owned as canonical at all times, and by all Christians. Whether the council of Laodicea was held before or after that of Nice, is not a settled point; all the books of the New Testament, except the Revelation, are enu-

merated as canonical in the constitutions of that council; but it is a great mistake to suppose, that the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were not in *general use* amongst Christians, long before the council of Laodicea was held. This is not merely my opinion on the subject; it is the opinion of one much better acquainted with ecclesiastical history than I am, and, probably, than you are,—*Mosheim.* "The opinions," says this author, "or rather the conjectures, of the learned, concerning the time when the books of the New Testament were collected into one volume, as also about the authors of that collection, are extremely different. This important question is attended with great and almost insuperable difficulties to us in these latter times. It is however sufficient for us to know, that, before the middle of the second century, the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were read in every christian society throughout the world, and received as a divine rule of faith and manners. Hence it appears, that these sacred writings were carefully separated from several human compositions upon the same subject, either by some of the apostles themselves, who lived so long, or by their disciples and successors, who were spread abroad through all nations. We are well assured, that the *four gospels* were collected during the life of St John, and that the three first received the approbation of this divine apostle. And why may we not suppose that the other books of the New Testament were gathered together at the same time? What renders this highly probable is, that the most urgent necessity required its being

done. For, not long after Christ's ascension into heaven, several histories of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds, and fabulous wonders, were composed by persons, whose intentions, perhaps, were not bad, but whose writings discovered the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all: productions appeared, which were imposed on the world by fraudulent men as the writings of the holy apostles. These apocryphal and spurious writings must have produced a sad confusion, and rendered both the history and the doctrine of Christ uncertain, had not the rulers of the church used all possible care and diligence in separating the books that were truly apostolical and divine, from all that spurious trash, and conveying them down to posterity in one volume."

Did you ever read the apology for the Christians, which Justin Martyr presented to the emperor Antoninus Pius, to the senate, and people of Rome? I should sooner expect a falsity in a petition, which any body of persecuted men, imploring justice, should present to the king and parliament of Great Britain, than in this apology; yet in this apology, which was presented not fifty years after the death of St John, not only parts of *all the four gospels are quoted*, but it is expressly said, that on the day called Sunday, a portion of them was read in the public assemblies of the Christians. I forbear pursuing this matter farther; else it might easily be shown, that probably the gospels, and certainly some of St Paul's epistles, were known to *Clement*, *Ignatius*, and *Polycarp*, contemporaries with the apostles. These men could not quote or refer to

books which did not exist: and therefore, though you could make it out that the book called the New Testament did not formally exist under that title, till 350 years after Christ; yet I hold it to be a certain fact, that all the books, of which it is composed, were written, and most of them received by all Christians within a few years after his death.

You raise a difficulty relative to the time which intervened between the death and resurrection of Jesus, who had said, that the Son of man should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Are you ignorant then that the Jews used the phrase three days and three nights, to denote what we understand by three days?—It is said in Genesis, chap. vii, 12. "The rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights;" and this is equivalent to the expression, (ver. 17.) "And the flood was forty days upon the earth." Instead then of saying three days and three nights, let us simply say—three days—and you will not object to Christ's being three days, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, in the heart of the earth. I do not say that he was in the grave the whole of either Friday or Sunday; but an hundred instances might be produced, from writers of all nations, in which a part of a day is spoken of as the whole. Thus much for the defence of the historical part of the New Testament.

You have introduced an account of *Faustus*, as denying the genuineness of the books of the New Testament. Will you permit that great scholar in sacred literature, *Michaelis*, to tell you something about this Faustus?—"He was ignorant, as were most of the African writers, of the Greek language,

and acquainted with the New Testament merely through the channel of the Latin translation; he was not only devoid of a sufficient fund of learning, but illiterate in the highest degree. An argument which he brings against the genuineness of the gospel affords sufficient ground for this assertion; for he contends, that the gospel of St Matthew could not have been written by St Matthew himself, because he is always mentioned in the third person." You know who has argued like Faustus, but I did not think myself authorized on that account to call you illiterate in the highest degree; but Michaelis makes a still more severe conclusion concerning Faustus; and he extends his observation to every man who argued like him—"A man capable of such an argument must have been ignorant not only of the Greek writers, the knowledge of which could not have been expected from Faustus, but even of the Commentaries of Cæsar. And were it thought improbable that so heavy a charge could be laid with justice on the side of his knowledge, it would fall with double weight on the side of his honesty, and induce us to suppose, that, preferring the arts of sophistry to the plainness of truth, he maintained opinions which he believed to be false." (Marsh's Transl.) Never more, I think, shall we hear of Moses not being the author of the Pentateuch, on account of its being written in the third person.

Not being able to produce any argument to render questionable, either the genuineness or the authenticity of St Paul's Epistles, you tell us that "it is a matter of no great importance by whom they were written, since the writer, whoever he was, at-

tempts to prove his doctrine by argument: he does not pretend to have been witness to any of the scenes told of the resurrection and ascension, and he declares that he had not believed them." That Paul had so far resisted the evidence which the apostles had given of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, as to be a persecutor of the disciples of Christ, is certain; but I do not remember the place where he declares that he had not believed them. The high priest and the senate of the children of Israel did not deny the reality of the miracles, which had been wrought by Peter and the apostles; they did not contradict their testimony concerning the resurrection and the ascension; but whether they believed it or not, they were fired with indignation, and took counsel to put the apostles to death: and this was also the temper of Paul: whether he believed or did not believe the story of the resurrection, he was exceedingly mad against the saints. The writer of Paul's Epistles does not attempt to prove his doctrine by argument; he in many places tells us, that his doctrine was not taught him by man, or any invention of his own, which required the ingenuity of argument to prove it:—"I certify you, brethren, that the gospel, which was preached of me, is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul does not pretend to have been a witness of the *story* of the resurrection, but he does much more; he asserts that he was himself a witness of the resurrection. After enumerating many appearances of Jesus to his disciples, Paul says of himself, "Last of all, he

was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Whether you will admit Paul to have been a *true* witness or not, you cannot deny that he pretends to have been *a* witness of the resurrection.

The story of his being struck to the ground, as he was journeying to Damascus, has nothing in it, you say, miraculous or extraordinary: you represent him as struck by lightning.—It is somewhat extraordinary for a man, who is struck by lightning, to have, at the very time, full possession of his understanding; to hear a voice issuing from the lightning, speaking to him in the Hebrew tongue, calling him by his name, and entering into conversation with him. His companions, you say, appear not to have suffered in the same manner:—the greater the wonder. If it was a common storm of thunder and lightning which struck Paul and all his companions to the ground, it is somewhat extraordinary that he alone should be hurt; and that notwithstanding his being struck blind by lightning, he should in other respects be so little hurt, as to be immediately able to walk into the city of Damascus. So difficult is it to oppose truth by an hypothesis! In the character of Paul you discover a great deal of violence and fanaticism; and such men, you observe, are never good moral evidences of any doctrine they preach.—Read, sir, Lord *Lyttleton's* observations on the conversion and apostleship of St Paul; and I think you will be convinced of the contrary. That elegant writer thus expresses his opinion on this subject—"Besides all the proofs of the christian religion, which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the

necessary connexion it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I think the conversion and apostleship of St Paul alone, duly considered, is, of itself, a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation." I hope this opinion will have some weight with you; it is not the opinion of a lying Bible-prophet, of a stupid evangelist, or of an *a b ab* priest,—but of a learned layman, whose illustrious rank received splendor from his talents.

You are displeased with St Paul "for setting out to prove the resurrection of the *same* body."—You know, I presume, that the resurrection of the same body is not by all, admitted to be a scriptural doctrine.—"In the New Testament (wherein, I think, are contained all the articles of the christian faith) I find our Saviour and the apostles to preach *the resurrection of the dead* and the *resurrection from the dead*, in many places; but I do not remember any place where the resurrection of the same body is so much as mentioned." This observation of Mr Locke I so far adopt, as to deny that you can produce any place in the writings of St Paul, wherein he sets out to prove the resurrection of the same body. I do not question the possibility of the resurrection of the same body, and I am not ignorant of the manner in which some learned men have explained it; (somewhat after the way of your vegetative speck in the kernel of a peach;) but as you are discrediting St Paul's doctrine, you ought to show that what you attempt to

discredit *is* the doctrine of the apostle! As a matter of choice you had rather have a better body—you will have a better body—"your natural body will be raised a spiritual body," "your corruptible will put on incorruption." You are so much out of humour with your present body, that you inform us, every animal in the creation excels us in something. Now I had always thought, that the single circumstance of our having hands, and their having none, gave us an infinite superiority not only over insects, fishes, snails, and spiders, (which you represent as excelling us in loco-motive powers,) but over all the animals of creation; and enabled us, in the language of Cicero, describing the manifold utility of our hands, to make as it were a new nature of things. As to what you say about the consciousness of existence being the only conceivable idea of a future life—it proves nothing either for or against the resurrection of a body, or of the same body; it does not inform us, whether to any or to what substance, material or immaterial, this consciousness is annexed. I leave it, however, to others, who do not admit personal identity to consist in consciousness, to dispute with you on this point, and willingly subscribe to the opinion of Mr Locke, "that nothing but consciousness can unite remote existences into the same person."

From a caterpillar's passing into a torpid state resembling death, and afterwards appearing a splendid butterfly, and from the (supposed) consciousness of existence which the animal had in these different states, you ask, Why must I believe, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to

continue in me the consciousness of existence hereafter?—I do not dislike analogical reasoning, when applied to proper objects, and kept within due bounds:—but where is it said in scripture, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in you the consciousness of existence? Those who admit a conscious state of the soul between death and the resurrection, will contend, that the soul is the substance in which consciousness is continued without interruption:—those who deny the intermediate state of the soul as a state of consciousness, will contend, that consciousness is not destroyed by death, but suspended by it, as it is suspended during a sound sleep, and that it may be as easily restored after death, as after sleep, during which the faculties of the soul are not extinct but dormant.—Those who think that the soul is nothing distinct from the compages of the body, not a substance, but a mere quality, will maintain, that the consciousness appertaining to every individual person is not lost when the body is destroyed; that it is known to God; and may, at the general resurrection, be annexed to any system of matter he may think fit, or to that particular compages to which it belonged in this life.

In reading your book I have been frequently shocked at the virulence of your zeal, at the indecorum of your abuse in applying vulgar and offensive epithets to men who have been held, and who will long, I trust, continue to be holden, in high estimation. I know that the scar of calumny is seldom wholly effaced, it remains long after the wound is healed; and your abuse of holy men and holy

things will be remembered, when your arguments against them are refuted and forgotten. Moses you term an arrogant coxcomb, a chief assassin ; Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, monsters and impostors ; the Jewish kings a parcel of rascals ; Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets, liars ; and Paul a fool ; for having written one of the sublimest compositions, and on the most important subject that ever occupied the mind of man—the lesson in our burial service :—this lesson you call a doubtful jargon, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of the bell at the funeral. Men of low condition ! pressed down, as you often are, by calamities generally incident to human nature, and groaning under the burdens of misery peculiar to your condition, what thought you when you heard this lesson read at the funeral of your child, your parent, or your friend ? Was it mere jargon to you, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of a bell ?—No—You understand from it, that you would not all sleep, but that you would all be changed in a moment at the last trump ; you understood from it, that this corruptible must put on incorruption ; that this mortal must put on immortality, and that death would be swallowed up in victory ; you understood from it, that if (notwithstanding profane attempts to subvert your faith) ye continue stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, your labour will not be in vain.

You seem fond of displaying your skill in science and philosophy ; you speak more than once of Euclid ; and in censuring St Paul you intimate to us, that when the apostle says—one star differeth from

another star in glory—he ought to have said—in distance. All men *see* that one star differeth from another star in glory or brightness; but few men *know* that their difference in brightness arises from their difference in distance; and I beg leave to say, that even you, philosopher as you are, do not *know* it. You make an assumption, which you cannot prove, that the stars are *equal* in magnitude, and placed at *different* distances from the earth; but you cannot prove that they are not *different* in magnitude, and placed at *equal* distances, though none of them may be so near to the earth, as to have any sensible annual *parallax*. I beg pardon of my readers for touching upon this subject; but it really moves one's indignation, to see a smattering in philosophy urged as an argument against the veracity of an apostle.—"Little learning is a dangerous thing."

Paul, you say, affects to be a naturalist; and to prove (you might more properly have said illustrate) his system of resurrection from the principles of vegetation—"Thou fool," says he, "that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die:"—to which one might reply, in his own language, and say—"Thou fool, Paul, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die *not*." It may be seen, I think, from this passage, who affects to be a naturalist, to be acquainted with the microscopical discoveries of modern times; which were probably neither known to Paul nor to the Corinthians; and which, had they been known to them both, would have been of little use in the illustration of the subject of the resurrection. Paul said—that which

thou sowest is not quickened except it die :—every husbandman in Corinth, though unable perhaps to define the term death, would understand the apostle's phrase in a popular sense, and agree with him that a grain of wheat must become *rotten* in the ground before it could sprout; and that, as God raised from a rotten grain of wheat, the roots, the stem, the leaves, the ear of a new plant, he might also cause a new body to spring up from the rotten carcase in the grave. Doctor *Clarke* observes—"In like manner as in every grain of corn there is contained a minute, insensible, seminal principle, which is itself the entire future blade and ear, and in due season, when all the rest of the grain is corrupted, evolves and unfolds itself visibly to the eye; so our present mortal and corruptible body may be but the *exuviæ*, as it were, of some hidden, and at present insensible principle, (possibly the present seat of the soul,) which at the resurrection shall discover itself in its proper form." I do not agree with this great man (for such I esteem him) in this philosophical conjecture; but the quotation may serve to show you, that the gem does not evolve and unfold itself visibly to the eye till all the rest of the grain is *corrupted;* that is, in the language and meaning of St Paul, till it *dies*. Though the authority of Jesus may have as little weight with you as that of Paul, yet it may not be improper to quote to you our Saviour's expression, when he foretels the numerous disciples which his death would produce—"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and *die*, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." You perceive from

this, that the Jews thought the death of the grain was necessary to its reproduction: hence every one may see what little reason you had to object to the apostle's popular illustration of the possibility of a resurrection. Had he known as much as any naturalist in Europe does, of the progress of an animal from one state to another, as from a worm to a butterfly, (which you think applies to the case,) I am of opinion he would not have used that illustration in preference to what he has used, which is obvious and satisfactory.

Whether the fourteen epistles ascribed to Paul were written by him or not, is, in your judgment a matter of indifference. So far from being a matter of indifference, I consider the genuineness of St Paul's epistles to be a matter of the greatest importance; for if the epistles, ascribed to Paul, were written by him, (and there is unquestionable proof that they were,) it will be difficult for you, or for any man, upon fair principles of sound reasoning, to deny that the christian religion is true. The argument is a short one, and obvious to every capacity. It stands thus:—St Paul wrote several letters to those whom, in different countries, he had converted to the christian faith; in these letters he affirms two things;—first, that he had wrought miracles in their presence;—secondly, that many of themselves had received the gift of tongues, and other miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. The persons to whom these letters were addressed must, on reading them, have certainly known, whether Paul affirmed what was true, or told a plain lie; they must have known whether they had seen him

work miracles, they must have been conscious, whether they themselves did or did not possess any miraculous gifts. Now can you, or can any man, believe, for a moment, that Paul (a man certainly of great abilities) would have written public letters, full of lies, and which could not fail of being discovered to be lies, as soon as his letters were read? Paul could not be guilty of falsehood in these two points, or in either of them; and if either of them be true, the christian religion is true. References to these two points are frequent in St Paul's epistles: I will mention only a few. In his epistle to the Galatians he says, (chap. iii. 2, 5.) "This only would I learn of you, received ye the spirit (gifts of the spirit) by the works of the law?—He ministereth to you the spirit, and worketh miracles among you." To the Thessalonians he says, (1 Thess. ch. i. 5.) "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost." To the Corinthians he thus expresses himself: (1 Cor. ii. 4.) "My preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the spirit and of power;" and he adds the reason for his working miracles—"That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." With what alacrity would the faction at Corinth, which opposed the apostle, have laid hold of this and many similar declarations in the letter, had they been able to have detected any falsehood in them? There is no need to multiply words on so clear a point—the genuineness of Paul's epistles prove their authenticity, independently of every other proof; for

it is absurd in the extreme to suppose him, under circumstances of obvious detection, capable of advancing what was not true; and if Paul's epistles be both genuine and authentic, the christian religion is true. Think of this argument.

You close your observations in the following manner: "Should the Bible (meaning as I have before remarked, the Old Testament) and Testament hereafter fall, it is not I that have been the occasion." You look, I think, upon your production with a parent's partial eye, when you speak of it in such a style of self-complacency. The Bible, sir, has withstood the learning of *Porphyry*, and the power of *Julian*, to say nothing of the Manichean *Faustus;* it has resisted the genius of *Bolingbroke*, and the wit of *Voltaire*, to say nothing of a numerous herd of inferior assailants; and it will not fall by your force. You have barbed anew the blunted arrows of former adversaries; you have feathered them with blasphemy and ridicule; dipped them in your deadliest poison; aimed them with your utmost skill; shot them against the shield of faith with your utmost vigour; but like the feeble javelin of aged *Priam*, they will scarcely reach the mark, will fall to the ground without a stroke.

LETTER X.

THE remaining part of your work can hardly be made the subject of animadversion. It principally consists of unsupported assertions, abusive appellations, illiberal sarcasms, *strifes of words, profane babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.* I am hurt at being, in mere justice to the subject, under the necessity of using such harsh language, and am sincerely sorry that, from what cause I know not, your mind has received a wrong bias in every point respecting revealed religion. You are capable of better things: for there is a philosophical sublimity in some of your ideas, when you speak of the Supreme Being, as the Creator of the universe. That you may not accuse me of disrespect, in passing over any part of your work without bestowing proper attention upon it, I will wait upon you through what you call—your conclusion.

You refer your reader to the former part of the Age of Reason; in which you have spoken of what you esteem three frauds—mystery, miracle, and prophecy. I have not at hand the book to which you refer, and know not what you have said on these subjects; they are subjects of great importance, and we, probably, should differ essentially in

our opinion concerning them; but I confess I am not sorry to be excused from examining what you have said on these points. The specimen of your reasoning, which is now before me, has taken from me every inclination to trouble either my reader or myself, with any observations on your former book.

You admit the possibility of God's revealing his will to man; yet "the thing so revealed," "is revelation to the person only to whom it is made; his account of it to another is not revelation." This is true; his account is simple testimony. You add, there is no "possible criterion to judge of the truth of what he says." This I positively deny; and contend, that a real miracle, performed in attestation of a revealed truth, is a certain criterion by which we may judge of the truth of that attestation. I am perfectly aware of the objections which may be made to this position; I have examined them with care; I acknowledge them to be of weight; but I do not speak unadvisedly, or as wishing to dictate to other men, when I say, that I am persuaded the position is true. So thought Moses, when, in the matter of Korah, he said to the Israelites—"If these men die the common death of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me." So thought Elijah, when he said—"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant;" and the people before whom he spake were of the same opinion; for when the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, they said—"The Lord he is the God." So thought our Saviour, when he said—"The works that I do in my Father's

name, they bear witness of me;" and, "if I do not the works of my Father believe me not."

What reason have we to believe Jesus, speaking in the gospel, and to disbelieve Mahomet speaking in the Koran? Both of them lay claim to a divine commission: and yet we receive the words of the one as a revelation from God, and we reject the words of the other as an imposture of man. The reason is evident; Jesus established his pretensions, not by alleging any secret communication with the Deity, but by working numerous and indubitable miracles in the presence of thousands, and which the most bitter and watchful of his enemies could not disallow; but Mahomet wrought no miracles at all. Nor is a miracle the only criterion by which we may judge of the truth of a revelation. If a series of prophets should, through a course of many centuries, predict the appearance of a certain person, whom God would, at a particular time, send into the world for a particular end; and at length a person should appear in whom all the predictions were minutely accomplished; such a completion of prophecy would be a criterion of the truth of that revelation, which that person should deliver to mankind. Or if a person should now say, (as many false prophets have said, and are daily saying,) that he had a commission to declare the will of God; and, as a proof of his veracity, should predict, that after his death, he would rise from the dead on the third day;—the completion of such a prophecy would, I presume, be a sufficient criterion of the truth of what this man might have said concerning the will of God. Now I tell you, (says Jesus

his disciples, concerning Judas, who was to betray him,) before it come, that when it is come to pass ye may believe that I am he. In various parts of the gospels our Saviour, with the utmost propriety, claims to be received as the messenger of God, not only from the miracles which he wrought, but from the prophecies which were fulfilled in his person, and from the predictions which he himself delivered. Hence, instead of there being no criterion by which we may judge of the truth of the christian revelation, there are clearly three. It is an easy matter to use an indecorous flippancy of language in speaking of the christian religion, and with a supercilious negligence to class Christ and his apostles among the impostors who have figured in the world; but it is not, I think, an easy matter for any man, of good sense and sound erudition, to make an impartial examination into any one of the three grounds of Christianity which I have here mentioned, and to reject it.

What is it, you ask, the Bible teaches?—The prophet Micah shall answer you: it teaches us, "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with my God;"—justice, mercy, and piety, instead of what you contend for—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it, you demand, the Testament teaches us? You answer your question—to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman.—Absurd and impious assertion! No, sir, no; this profane doctrine, this miserable stuff, this blasphemous perversion of scripture, is your doctrine, not that of the New Testament. I will tell you the lesson which it teaches to infidels as

well as to believers; it is a lesson which philoso-
phy never taught, which wit cannot ridicule, nor
sophistry disprove; the lesson is this—"The dead
shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they
that hear shall live:—all that are in their graves
shall come forth; they that have done good, unto
the resurrection of life; and they that have done
evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

The moral precepts of the gospel are so well
fitted to promote the happiness of mankind in this
world, and to prepare human nature for the fu-
ture enjoyment of that blessedness of which, in
our present state, we can form no conception, that
I had no expectation they would have met with
your disapprobation. You say, however—"As to
the scraps of morality that are irregularly and thin-
ly scattered in those books, they make no part of
the pretended thing, revealed religion."—"What-
soever ye would that men should do to you, do
ye even so to them." Is this a scrap of morali-
ty? Is it not rather the concentred essence of
all ethics, the vigorous root from which every
branch of moral duty towards each other may be
derived? Duties, you know, are distinguished by
moralists into duties of perfect and imperfect ob-
ligation: does the Bible teach you nothing, when
it instructs you, that this distinction is done away
when it bids you "put on bowels of mercies,
kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-
suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one
another, if any man have a quarrel against any.
These, and precepts such as these, you will in vain
look for in the codes of *Frederick* or *Justinian*

you cannot find them in our statute books; they were not taught nor are they taught in the schools of heathen philosophy; or, if some one or two of them should chance to be glanced at by a Plato, a Seneca, or a Cicero, they are not bound upon the consciences of mankind by any sanction. It is in the gospel, and in the gospel alone, that we learn their importance; acts of benevolence and brotherly love may be to an unbeliever voluntary acts, to a Christian they are indispensable duties. Is a new commandment no part of revealed religion? "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another:" the law of christian benevolence is enjoined us by Christ himself, in the most solemn manner, as the distinguishing badge of our being his disciples.

Two precepts, you particularize as inconsistent with the dignity and the nature of man—that of not resenting injuries, and that of loving enemies. Who but yourself ever interpreted literally the proverbial phrase—If a man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also?—Did Jesus himself turn the other cheek when the officer of the high priest smote him? It is evident, that a patient acquiescence under slight personal injuries is here enjoined: and that a proneness to revenge, which instigates men to savage acts of brutality, for every trifling offence, is forbidden. As to loving enemies, it is explained, in another place, to mean, the doing them all the good in our power; "if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink;" and what, think you, is more likely to preserve peace, and to promote kind affections

amongst men, than the returning good for evil? Christianity does not order us to love in proportion to the injury—"it does not offer a premium for a crime,"—it orders us to let our benevolence extend alike to all, that we may emulate the benignity of God himself, who maketh "his sun to rise on the evil and on the good."

In the law of Moses, retaliation for deliberate injuries had been ordained—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. *Aristotle*, in his treatise of morals, says, that some thought retaliation of personal wrongs an equitable proceeding; *Rhadamanthus* is said to have given it his sanction; the decemviral laws allow it; the common law of England did not forbid it; and it is said to be still the law of some countries, even in Christendom: but the mild spirit of Christianity absolutely prohibits, not only the retaliation of injuries, but the indulgence of every resentful propensity.

"It has been," you affirm, "the scheme of the christian church to hold man in ignorance of the Creator, as it is of government to hold him in ignorance of his rights." I appeal to the plain sense of any honest man to judge whether this representation be true in either particular. When he attends the service of the church, does he discover any design in the minister to keep him in ignorance of his Creator? Are not the public prayers in which he joins, the lessons which are read to him, the sermons which are preached to him, all calculated to impress upon his mind a strong conviction of the mercy, justice, holiness, power, and wisdom of the one adorable God, blessed for ever! By

these means, which the christian church hath provided for our instruction, I will venture to say, that the most unlearned congregations of Christians in Great Britain have more just and sublime conceptions of the Creator, a more perfect knowledge of their duty towards him, and a stronger inducement to the practice of virtue, holiness, and temperance, than all the philosophers of all the heathen countries in the world ever had, or now have. If, indeed, your scheme should take place, and men should no longer believe their Bible, then would they soon become as ignorant of their Creator, as all the world was when God called Abraham from his kindred; and as all the world, which has had no communication with either Jews or Christians, now is. Then would they soon bow down to stocks and stones, kiss their hand (as they did in the time of Job, and as the poor African does now,) to *the moon walking in brightness, and deny the God that is above;* then would they worship Jupiter, Bacchus, and Venus, and emulate, in the transcendent flagitiousness of their lives, the impure morals of their Gods.

What design has government to keep men in ignorance of their rights? None whatever. All wise statesmen are persuaded, that the more men know of their rights, the better subjects they will become. Subjects, not from necessity but choice, are the firmest friends of every government. The people of Great Britain are well acquainted with their natural and social rights; they understand them better than the people of any other country do; they know that they have a right to be free,

not only from the capricious tyranny of any one man's will, but from the more afflicting despotism of republican factions; and it is this very knowledge which attaches them to the constitution of their country. I have no fear that the people should know too much of their rights; my fear is that they should not know them in all their relations, and to their full extent. The government does not desire that men should remain in ignorance of their rights; but it both desires, and requires, that they should not disturb the public peace, under vain pretences; that they should make themselves acquainted not merely with the rights, but with the duties also of men in civil society. I am far from ridiculing (as some have done) the rights of man; I have, long ago, understood, that the poor as well as the rich, and that the rich as well as the poor, have, by nature, some rights, which no human government can justly take from them, without their tacit or express consent; and some also which they themselves have no power to surrender to any government. One of the principal rights of man, in a state either of nature or of society, is a right of property in the fruits of his industry, ingenuity, or good fortune. Does government hold any man in ignorance of this right?—So much the contrary, that the chief care of government is to declare, ascertain, modify, and defend this right; nay, it gives right where nature gives none; it protects the goods of an intestate; and it allows a man, at his death, to dispose of that property, which the law of nature would cause to revert into the common stock. Sincerely as I am attached to the liberties

of mankind, I cannot but profess myself an utter enemy to that spurious philosophy, that democratic insanity, which would equalize all property, and level all distinctions in civil society. Personal distinctions, arising from superior probity, learning, eloquence, skill, courage, and from every other excellency of talents, are the very blood and nerves of the body politic; they animate the whole, and invigorate every part; without them, its bones would become reeds, and its marrow water; it would presently sink into a fetid, senseless mass of corruption. Power may be used for private ends, and in opposition to the public good; rank may be improperly conferred, and insolently sustained; riches may be wickedly acquired, and viciously applied; but as this is neither necessarily, nor generally the case, I cannot agree with those who, in asserting the natural equality of men, spurn the instituted distinctions attending power, rank, and riches. But I mean not to enter into any discussion on this subject, farther than to say, that your crimination of government appears to me to be wholly unfounded; and to express my hope that no one individual will be so far misled by disquisitions on the rights of man, as to think that he has any right to do wrong, as to forget that other men have rights as well as he.

You are animated with proper sentiments of piety, when you speak of the structure of the universe. No one, indeed, who considers it with attention can fail of having his mind filled with the supremest veneration for its Author. Who can contemplate, without astonishment, the motion of a comet run-

ning far beyond the orb of Saturn, endeavouring to escape into the pathless regions of unbounded space, yet feeling, at its utmost distance, the attractive influence of the sun, hearing, as it were, the voice of God, arresting its progress, and compelling it, after a lapse of ages, to reiterate its ancient course? Who can comprehend the distance of the stars from the earth, and from each other? It is so great, that it mocks our conception; our very imagination is terrified, confounded and lost, when we are told that a ray of light which moves at the rate of above ten millions of miles in a minute, will not, though emitted at this instant from the brightest star, reach the earth in less than six years. We think this earth a great globe; and we see the sad wickedness, which individuals are often guilty of, in scraping together a little of its dirt: we view, with still greater astonishment and horror, the mighty ruin which has, in all ages, been brought upon human kind, by the low ambition of contending powers, to acquire a temporary possession of a little portion of its surface. But how does the whole of this globe sink, as it were, to nothing, when we consider that a million of earths will scarcely equal the bulk of the sun; that all the stars are suns; and that millions of suns constitute, probably, but a minute portion of that material world, which God hath distributed through the immensity of space? Systems, however, of insensible matter, though arranged in exquisite order, prove only the wisdom and the power of the great Architect of nature.—As percipient beings, we look for something more—for his goodness—and we cannot open our eyes without seeing it.

Every portion of the earth, sea, and air, is full of sensitive beings, capable, in their respective orders, of enjoying the good things which God hath prepared for their comfort. All the orders of beings are enabled to propagate their kind; and thus provision is made for a successive continuation of happiness. Individuals yield to the law of dissolution inseparable from the material structure of their bodies: but no gap is thereby left in existence; their place is occupied by other individuals capable of participating in the goodness of the Almighty. Contemplations such as these, fill the mind with humility, benevolence, and piety. But why should we stop here? why not contemplate the goodness of God in the redemption, as well as in the creation of the world? By the death of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, he hath redeemed the whole human race from the eternal death, which the transgression of Adam had entailed on all his posterity. —You believe nothing about the transgression of Adam. The history of Eve and the serpent excites your contempt; you will not admit that it is either a real history, or an allegorical representation of death entering into the world through sin, through disobedience to the command of God.—Be it so.— You find, however, that death doth reign over all mankind, by whatever means it was introduced; this is not a matter of belief, but of lamentable knowledge. The New Testament tells us, that, through the merciful dispensation of God, Christ hath overcome death, and restored man to that immortality which Adam had lost:—this also you refuse to believe.—Why? Because you cannot account

for the propriety of this redemption.—Miserable reason! stupid objection! What is there that you can account for? Not for the germination of a blade of grass, not for the fall of a leaf of the forest—and will you refuse to eat of the fruits of the earth, because God has not given you wisdom equal to his own? Will you refuse to lay hold on immortality, because he has not given you, because he, probably, could not give to such a being as man, a full manifestation of the end for which he designs him, nor of the means requisite for the attainment of that end? What father of a family can make level to the apprehension of his infant children, all the views of happiness which his paternal goodness is preparing for them? How can he explain to them the utility of reproof, correction, instruction, example, of all the various means by which he forms their minds to piety, temperance, and probity? We are children in the hand of God; we are in the very infancy of our existence; just separated from the womb of eternal duration; it may not be possible for the Father of the universe to explain to us (infants in apprehension!) the goodness and the wisdom of his dealings with the sons of men. What qualities of mind will be necessary for our well-doing through all eternity, we know not; what discipline in this infancy of existence may be necessary for generating these qualities, we know not; whether God could, or could not, consistently with the general good, have forgiven the transgression of Adam, without any atonement, we know not; whether the malignity of sin be not so great, so opposite to the general good, that it can-

not be forgiven whilst it exists, that is, whilst the mind retains a propensity to it, we know not: so that if there should be much greater difficulty in comprehending the mode of God's moral government of mankind than there really is, there would be no reason for doubting of its rectitude. If the whole human race be considered as but one small member of a large community of free and intelligent beings of different orders, and if this whole community be subject to discipline and laws productive of the greatest possible good to the whole system, then may we still more reasonably suspect our capacity to comprehend the wisdom and goodness of God's proceedings in the moral government of the universe.

You are lavish in your praise of deism; it is so much better than atheism, that I mean not to say any thing to its discredit; it is not, however, without its difficulties. What think you of an uncaused cause of every thing? of a Being who has no relation to time, not being older to day than he was yesterday, nor younger to-day than he will be to-morrow? who has no relation to space, not being a part here and a part there or a whole any where? What think you of an omniscient Being, who cannot know the future actions of a man? Or if his omniscience enables him to know them, what think you of the contingency of human actions? And if human actions are not contingent, what think you of the morality of actions, of the distinction between vice and virtue, crime and innocence, sin and duty? What think you of the infinite goodness of a Being who existed through eternity, without any emana-

tion of his goodness manifested in the creation of sensitive beings? Or, if you contend that there has been an eternal creation, what think you of an effect coeval with its cause, of matter not posterior to its Maker? What think you of the existence of evil, moral and natural, in the work of an infinite Being, powerful, wise, and good? What think you of the gift of freedom of will, when the abuse of freedom becomes the cause of general misery? I could propose to your consideration a great many other questions of a similar tendency, the contemplation of which has driven not a few from deism to atheism, just as the difficulties in revealed religion have driven yourself, and some others, from christianity to deism.

For my own part, I can see no reason why either revealed or natural religion should be abandoned, on account of the difficulties which attend either of them. I look up to the incomprehensible Maker of heaven and earth with unspeakable admiration and self-annihilation, and am a deist.—I contemplate with the utmost gratitude and humility of mind, his unsearchable wisdom and goodness in the redemption of the world from eternal death, through the intervention of his Son Jesus Christ, and am a Christian.—As a deist I have little expectation; as a Christian, I have no doubt of a future state. I speak for myself, and may be in an error, as to the ground of the first part of this opinion. You and other men may conclude differently. From the inert nature of matter—from the faculties of the human mind—from the apparent imperfection of God's moral government of the world—from

many modes of analogical reasoning, and from other sources, some of the philosophers of antiquity did collect, and modern philosophers may, perhaps, collect a strong probability of a future existence; and not only of a future existence, but (which is quite a distinct question) of a future state of retribution, proportioned to our moral conduct in this world. Far be it from me to loosen any of the obligations to virtue; but I must confess, that I cannot, from the same sources of argumentation, derive any positive assurance on this subject. Think, then, with what thankfulness of heart I receive the word of God, which tells me, that though "in Adam (by the condition of our nature) all die;" yet "in Christ (by the covenant of grace) shall all be made alive." I lay hold on "eternal life as the gift of God, through Jesus Christ;" I consider it not as any appendage to the nature I derive from Adam, but as the free gift of the Almighty, through his Son, whom he hath constituted Lord of all, the Saviour, the Advocate, and the Judge of human kind.

"Deism," you affirm," "teaches us, without the possibility of being mistaken, all that is necessary or proper to be known." There are three things, which all reasonable men admit are necessary and proper to be known—the being of God—the providence of God—a future state of retribution. Whether these three truths are so taught us by deism, that there is no possibility of being mistaken concerning any of them, let the history of philosophy, and of idolatry, and of superstition, in all ages and countries, determine. A volume might be filled

with an account of the mistakes into which the greatest reasoners have fallen, and of the uncertainty in which they lived, with respect to every one of these points. I will advert briefly, only to the last of them. Notwithstanding the illustrious labours of *Gassendi*, *Cudworth*, *Clarke*, *Baxter*, and of above two hundred other modern writers on the subject, the *natural* mortality or immortality of the human soul is as little understood by us as it was by the philosophers of Greece or Rome. The opposite opinions of *Plato* and of *Epicurus*, on this subject, have their several supporters amongst the learned of the present age, in Great-Britain, Germany, France, Italy, in every enlightened part of the world; and they who have been most seriously occupied in the study of the question, concerning a future state, as deducible from the nature of the human soul, are least disposed to give from reason a positive decision of it either way. The importance of revelation is by nothing rendered more apparent than by the discordant sentiments of learned and good men (for I speak not of the ignorant and immoral) on this point. They show the insufficiency of human reason, in a course of above two thousand years, to unfold the mysteries of human nature, and to furnish, from the contemplation of it, any assurance of the quality of our future condition. If you should ever become persuaded of this insufficiency, (and you can scarce fail of becoming so, if you examine the matter deeply), you will, if you act rationally, be disposed to investigate, with seriousness and impartiality, the truth of Christianity. You will say of the gospel, as the *Northumbrian*

heathens said of *Paulinus*, by whom they were converted to the christian religion—"The more we reflect on the nature of our soul, the less we know of it. While it animates our body, we may know some of its properties; but when once separated, we know not whither it goes, or from whence it came. Since, then, the *gospel* pretends to give us clearer notions of these matters, we ought to hear it, and laying aside all passion and prejudice, follow that which shall appear most conformable to right reason."

What a blessing is it to beings, with such limited capacities as ours confessedly are, to have God himself for our instructor in every thing which it much concerns us to know! We are principally concerned in knowing—not the origin of arts, or the recondite depths of science—not the histories of mighty empires, desolating the globe by their contentions—not the subtleties of logic, the mysteries of metaphysics, the sublimities of poetry, or the niceties of criticism.—These, and subjects such as these, properly occupy the learned leisure of a few; but the bulk of human kind have ever been, and must ever remain, ignorant of them all; they must, of necessity, remain in the same state with that which a German emperor voluntarily put himself into, when he made a resolution, bordering on barbarism, that he would never read a printed book. We are all, of every rank and condition, equally concerned in knowing—what will become of us after death; and, if we are to live again, we are interested in knowing—whether it be possible for us to do any thing whilst we live here, which may

render that future life an happy one.—Now, "that thing called Christianity," as you scoffingly speak—that last best gift of Almighty God, as I esteem it, the gospel of Jesus Christ, has given us the most clear and satisfactory information on both these points. It tells us, what deism never could have told us, that, we shall certainly be raised from the dead—that, whatever be the nature of the soul, we shall certainly live for ever—and that, whilst we live here, it is possible for us to do much towards the rendering of that everlasting life an happy one. These are tremendous truths to bad men; they cannot be received and reflected on with indifference by the best; and they suggest to all such a cogent motive to virtuous actions, as deism could not furnish even to *Brutus* himself.

Some men have been warped to infidelity by viciousness of life; and some have hypocritically professed Christianity from prospects of temporal advantage: but being a stranger to your character, I neither impute the former to you, nor can admit the latter as operating on myself. The generality of unbelievers are such from want of information on the subject of religion; having been engaged from their youth in struggling for worldly distinction, or perplexed with the incessant intricacies of business, or bewildered in the pursuits of pleasure: they have neither ability, inclination, nor leisure, to enter into critical disquisitions concerning the truth of Christianity. Men of this description are soon startled by objections which they are not competent to answer: and the loose morality of the age (so opposite to christian perfection!) co-operating with

their want of scriptural knowledge, they presently get rid of their nursery faith, and are seldom sedulous in the acquisition of another, founded, not on authority, but sober investigation. Presuming, however, that many deists are as sincere in their belief as I am in mine, and knowing that some are more able, and all as much interested as myself, to make a rational inquiry into the truth of revealed religion, I feel no propensity to judge uncharitably of any of them. They do not think as I do, on a subject surpassing all others in importance; but they are not, on that account, to be spoken of by me with asperity of language, to be thought of by me as persons alienated from the mercies of God. The gospel has been offered to their acceptance; and from whatever cause they reject it, I cannot but esteem their situation to be dangerous. Under the influence of that persuasion I have been induced to write this book. I do not expect to derive from it either fame or profit; these are not improper incentives to honorable activity; but there is a time of life when they cease to direct the judgment of thinking men. What I have written will not, I fear, make any impression on you; but I indulge an hope, that it may not be without its effect on some of your readers. Infidelity is a rank weed; it threatens to overspread the land; its root is principally fixed amongst the great and opulent; but you are endeavouring to extend the malignity of its poison through all the classes of the community. There is a class of men, for whom I have the greatest respect, and whom I am anxious to preserve from the contamination of your irreligion—

the merchants, manufacturers, and tradesmen of the kingdom. I consider the influence of the example of this class as essential to the welfare of the community. I know that they are in general given to reading, and desirous of information on all subjects. If this little book should chance to fall into their hands after they have read yours, and they should think that any of your objections to the authority of the Bible have not been fully answered, I entreat them to attribute the omission to the brevity which I have studied; to my desire of avoiding learned disquisitions; to my inadvertency; to my inability; to any thing rather than an impossibility of completely obviating every difficulty you have brought forward. I address the same request to such of the youth of both sexes, as may unhappily have imbibed, from your writings, the poison of infidelity; beseeching them to believe, that all their religious doubts may be removed, though it may not have been in my power to answer, to their satisfaction, all your objections. I pray God that the rising generation of this land may be preserved from that "evil heart of unbelief," which has brought ruin on a neighbouring nation; that neither a neglected education, nor domestic irreligion, nor evil communication, nor the fashion of a licentious world, may ever induce them to forget, that religion alone ought to be their rule of life.

In the conclusion of my *Apology for Christianity*, I informed Mr Gibbon of my extreme aversion to public controversy. I am now twenty years older than I was then, and I perceive that this my aversion has increased with my age. I have,

through life, abandoned my little literary productions to their fate; such of them as have been attacked, have never received any defence from me, nor will this receive any, if it should meet with your public notice, or with that of any other man.

Sincerely wishing that you may become a partaker of that faith in revealed religion, which is the foundation of my happiness in this world, and of all my hopes in another, I bid you farewell.

R. LANDAFF.

Calgarth Park,
Jan. 20, 1796.